VAGABONDS

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By

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PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

TWO men came shuffling north from the neighbouring village; their faces were swarthy and their beards were thin and turning grey; one of them carried a hand-organ on his back.

Surely no one in the entire village had expected anything of unusual importance to happen on this particular day, and here these two strangers turned up. They made for a conspicuous place among the houses, set the organ upon a stake and began to play. Everyone who lived in the place streamed out-of-doors—children and women-folk, the half-grown and the lame—a circle of faces surrounded the music-makers. There was so little excitement now that it was winter and all the men-folk were off in Lofoten; no one danced and no one sang; the whole village was poor and desolate and so these strange music-men were a grand experience—a real adventure—not one of the villagers would forget this adventure as long as ever he lived.

One man turned the crank. He had something the matter with one of his eyes which appeared to be blind. The other man was carrying a sack, but he took no part in the entertainment; he was only a kind of escort. He now stood staring down at his worn-out boots. Suddenly he snatched off his hat and held it out. But how could he expect money in this out-of-the-way place where one and all simply managed as best they could until spring came and the men returned from the Lofoten fishing. He got nothing for his pains and put his hat back on his head. He stood still for a moment and then began talking to his comrade in some foreign language. His voice grew

loud and harsh and it seemed that he wanted to stop the music and take the musician away with him. But the latter went on playing, shifted over to a new tune and cranked out a soft lugubrious melody, which held the audience spellbound. A young housewife, who was a trifle more prosperous than the rest, turned on her heel and was perhaps of a mind to go into the house after a coin. The musician's partner must certainly have misunderstood her purpose and thought that she was leaving for good, for he yelled after her and made a face. 'Hush!' the musician said to him. What's that, hush? The escort was not the kind of man one could tell to hush!—he became furious, sprang at his comrade and pounded him. That would not have been so bad, except that the half-blind musician wasn't able to protect himself from the attack since he had to hold on to the organ which was resting upon a stake and already swaying unsteadily. His hands thus occupied, he could do no more than duck his head. A groan went up from the audience at this unexpected attack; the circle spread out at once; children became terrified and screamed.

It was then that Edevart ran forward, a half-grown youth of thirteen, freckle-faced and light-haired, his eyes blazing with excitement. He was afraid of nothing, was ready to face death itself if necessary. He made for the assailant, tried a 'crowfoot' on him and failed; another attempt and he was successful—he tripped his man and had him on the ground. The lad breathed like a bellows; his mother screamed at him to come away, but Edevart kept at it. He seemed to have lost control of himself and snarled and bared his teeth. 'You come home with me this minute!' cried his mother in despair. She was a thin and bloodless woman, as unimpressive a person as any one could imagine—all her days she had been quiet and religious, not the sort of person one is led to obey.

The stranger raised himself up from the ground. He

scowled at the boy but offered him no harm. On the contrary, he seemed to be embarrassed and brushed the snow from his clothes with an affected attention to detail. He spoke again to his comrade, shook both fists in front of his nose; then he sneaked away and disappeared.

The musician was left behind. He sniveled a bit and moaned; a red streak showed on one of his cheeks—a remarkably bluish colour for blood, but that was no doubt because he was from a foreign land and had a swarthy complexion.

'He ought to have had a club laid on his back!' mumbled the young housewife and stared after the retreating ruffian. With that, she went in after a coin.

When the other women saw her, they all decided to follow her example and, one after another, they went into their houses after money. God knows, perhaps the musician had more worldly goods than any of those who gave —they were so very poor—but their hearts were overflowing and they made their little offering. They came with their copper coins, petty change to be sure, but money to them right now, and these they presented to the weeping organ-grinder.

And now the musician himself held nothing back; he suddenly threw open a shutter in the side of the organ and a whole theatre, a little paradise, came into view. 'Oh!' breathed the audience. Never before had anything like this been seen in the village: small figures, painted and gilded, stood there on a miniature stage, and, in time to the music, turned around and took a step forward, halted and then turned around again.

'Napoleon!' said the musician and pointed to the figure in the middle.

All of them had heard the name of Napoleon and they stared with speechless admiration. Napoleon was accompanied by two of his generals. These, too, were brightly painted with stars and decorations and the musician called

them each by name. But Napoleon was the centre of attraction. He wore a grey cape and held a short spy-glass in his hand; now and then he would raise the glass to his eye and let it fall again. In front of all these dignitaries stood a figure of the strangest kind of a boy; bareheaded he was and in rags; laughing, he held out a little empty cup after money. Then, when a coin lay in the cup, the lad would pick it out and throw it straight into a money-box. Wonder of wonders! Was the lad alive? He seemed to laugh more than ever when he held out his cup again.

And the musician played on. Marches, waltzes and songs floated out over the heads of the people and over the houses. A black dog sat in the snow some distance away and howled to the sky. It was a day which none would ever forget.

When there were no more coins for the boy to throw into his money-box, a little girl dropped a shiny button into the cup. It might have been the only shiny button she had to her name, but it was not money. And now the greatest wonder of all occurred: the boy suddenly turned in the opposite direction and flung the button far out into the snow. For a moment everyone was stunned. What in the name of Heaven!—was the lad human? The young housewife was the first to laugh. She dropped a dress-hook into the cup and saw how it, too, was flung far away. Then everyone laughed. But the little girl got down on her knees in the snow and searched for her shiny button which had been so rudely discarded.

To keep things going, one after another of the spectators lay worthless things in the boy's cup,—nails, pebbles, and bits of wood. But at length the boy grew tired of this and shook the cup so violently that no one could put anything in it. Was he, then, the only one of all of them to use his head!

The musician stopped playing, closed the shutter on the

miniature theatre and began to unscrew the handle, sighing heavily as he worked.

'Why are you travelling with *him?*' asked Edevart darkly.

The musician explained it as well as he could: They owned the organ in partnership, but his friend was an evil fellow indeed. 'See here, where once he stabbed me in the eye with his knife!' The musician never dared to exhibit Napoleon and the other figures when his partner was around; that man, he was so nasty-tempered, he would break up the entire theatre.

'Where are you from?' asked Edevart.

He was from Armenia.

'Where is that?'

Far away. Oh, far beyond all the other countries. *Gewiss.* Across many mountains and long stretches of water, a year's journey away from this place.

'Come in and have a bit to eat,' said the young housewife.

They followed him in—as many as the cottage would hold. The rest stood outside and stared in through the windows. There wasn't much to the man; he merely sat down and hung his head, an object of everyone's pity. They saw him ask a blessing for the food, and eat herring and potatoes, and after that he had some barley soup.

He said another blessing and moved to rise from the table and give thinks for the food.

The young housewife said: 'If I had any coffee, you should surely have a cup.'

'I'm not entirely out of it,' said another woman, helpfully.

'Well, then, you can loan me a spoonful.'

All was well as long as the man remained seated; the women figured out ways to hold him and keep him away from his brutal partner.

'Which way did he go?' they asked.

No one knew, not even the organ-grinder himself.

'Perhaps he has gone for good?'

'Oh, no!' The man shook his head and sighed. He began to shift his feet and knock his frozen boots together.

They asked him if his feet were cold and he answered yes, they were. Then they inquired about his stockings, and he said that his stockings were full of holes, yes, many holes, large holes.

They looked at each other and nodded and the young housewife who was so prosperous brought out a brand-new pair of stockings, and gave them to the man. These stockings were very handsome indeed; there was a blue border around the top of each.

'Oh, you Ane Maria, look what a one you are!' whispered the other women admiringly.

'Put them on now!' said Ane Maria.

This the man would not do; no, he behaved as though he did not have the heart to spoil the stockings. He held them lovingly against his cheek and tucked them inside his shirt against his breast. Everyone was moved.

One person was standing off in a corner of the room and seemed to be working out a plan, and that was Edevart. When the musician had said his thanks for all the kindness he had received, he hoisted his organ-case up on his back and shuffled away. 'The Lord be with you!' they all called after him. Sorrowful eyes watched him as long as he was in sight. But Edevart secretly followed a little way behind.

When the man came to the woods, he slowly turned around with his burden and discovered Edevart.

'Where do you think you're going?' he asked.

'No place,' answered Edevart.

'What's that? No place?'

Edevart said: 'I'll help you with that partner of yours.'

'Help me? No.'

'I'll knock him silly!'

The man had to smile at this. His comrade was no ordinary fellow, but rough and strong—great fighting men, the Hungarians. 'He likes to use his knife,' said he.

Edevart declined to reply to this; he strode past the man and began to walk on ahead.

'Fool—fool!' called the man with sudden exasperation. 'Go on home! What do you want here, anyway?'

And then, all of a sudden, another man appeared from behind a juniper bush—the partner in all his glory. First he surveyed the situation carefully and then he put a question to the musician. The latter made some reply. Then they both laughed.

Edevart stood still and stared. The Hungarian stepped menacingly forward. The bewildered lad would not have been bluffed by this, but then the musician put down his hand-organ and he, too, began to make threatening remarks. What was the meaning of all this? Edevart's head was not used to puzzling out difficult situations; he was stupid at both reading and at arithmetic, but he had good fists and when he was stirred up he was a devil of a fellow for courage. But now he retreated.

The strangers were not in the least embarrassed by his presence and let him stand where he was. The musician took snow in his hand and rubbed the red blood-stain from his cheek; his partner told him when the blood was gone. After that they opened the money-drawer of the hand-organ and counted the coins. The stockings too were examined and packed away in the Hungarian's sack.

Then the musician swung his burden across his back again. The two nodded curtly to Edevart and resumed their journey northward toward the next cluster of houses.

Edevart couldn't make head or tail of all this but now he became suddenly meek. When it finally dawned upon him that he had been made a fool of, he grabbed a handful of snow and packed it into a ball. But when he had

made the snowball good and hard, he dropped it on the ground and let it lie.

He was a changed lad when he arrived back home, disgusted with himself, and discouraged and not a little embarrassed. He walked over to where the little girl was still hunting about in the snow.

'Haven't you found your button yet?' he asked.

'No,' she said.

'Never mind.'

The girl ignored this and continued her search.

Edevart was dull when it came to books and at school his was a mind to be pitied, but nevertheless he had instincts, so it seemed. He went over to the place where the organ had stood and from there measured with his eye the distance a button might be flung by a mechanical doll. Then he, too, began to search. The girl clung closely to his side with renewed hope. 'There was a crown on it,' said she of the button.

While they were hunting, they heard a call from one of the cottages. 'Where have you got to, Ragna?' Ragna did not answer. Patiently they went on searching; each with a stick of firewood, they scratched in the snow and at length found the button. Ragna herself found it and her joy was great as she hastened into the house.

The whole affair was but an incident in Edevart's life. He reviewed his experience in the woods with anything but a clear understanding of its meaning, but it laid within him a foundation upon which later experiences might be built. The next winter he was taken to Lofoten as a half-hand in one of the boats, although he had not even been confirmed as yet. This was nothing to be sniffed at; older lads than he had been left at home. And it did him good to be thus recognized; he lost some of his natural shyness and began to have something to say when folk were gathered together.

But in the spring he was refused confirmation by the parson. Everyone thought that this was a great pity and naturally it was a particularly keen disappointment to his father and mother who were both able to read and were deeply religious folk. He would have to go to school another year and this took the wind out of his sails again. But at length when he was fifteen, he passed his examinations, was confirmed and was able to take his place among the grown-ups. He read wretchedly and was terrified by books, but he was no more stupid than many other lads and had grown up big and strong, a capable lad for work and kind and good-natured; his parents and his brothers and sisters had in him a staunch pillar of support.

A widely travelled young man came home to the village; one August by name, an orphan. To be exact, he was from another parish, but had grown up here. Now among a number of other things, August had been to sea for some years and had visited many lands. It was a wonder and a marvel how much he could tell of his life. Rich he was not and he never claimed that he was; but he wore beautiful blue clothes, owned a silver watch and had a few dollars in his pocket. Since he was without near kinsfolk, he stayed with the woman who had reared him; but he went everywhere in the village and was looked upon with favour by everyone. The young girls romanced about him and the little boys listened to his tales with open mouths. A warm friendship sprang up between him and Edevart.

This is the way it began:

In an accident at sea August had had his mouth gashed a bit and his teeth knocked out. Later he had done everything possible to conceal these blemishes by growing a powerful moustache and having a row of gold teeth set in his mouth. Edevart had never in his life seen such glorious teeth and he immediately laid plans to purchase a similar set as soon as he could afford it. August did not hesitate

to tell just where he had acquired this golden bridge and exactly what it had cost him. No mere handful of small change you may stake your life on that. He had saved for months and for years before he could get them, he said. The girls, too, had no fault to find with August's teeth, but most of the young men soon began to laugh at them and make fun of them. They were jealous and angry at this August who had come here and turned all the girls' heads.

As time passed, the situation grew worse and worse; the young men held together in scoffing at the sailor and they were on the point of turning even the girls against him. And the young housewife Ane Maria, said to him, in the hearing of all, that he really ought not to open his mouth so wide when he laughed.

'Why not?' asked August.

'No. You shouldn't show those teeth of yours.'

Many laughed at this but August, good-natured and indifferent as sailor-lads are, made no reply.

But this was more than Edevart could stand. He turned on her and said: 'You needn't have given those stockings to the organ-grinder.'

'Why not?' asked Ane Maria, taken back.

'What stockings?' demanded her husband, whose name was Karolus.

'New stockings,' said Edevart.

Ane Maria found something to do over by the window and asked from over there: 'Why shouldn't I have given them to him?'

'Because he didn't need them. He sold them for eighteen cents at one of the farms north of here.'

'You know that?'

'Yes, I know it. He didn't want to carry them. I saw the stockings again at a place north of here.'

Ane Maria said: 'I can't make out what business it is of yours, anyway.'

But now her husband spoke up again: 'I asked you what stockings those were you gave him.'

When he had heard her explanation, he sat with a dark expression on his face and Ane Maria began to cry. Her husband said: 'Ho, and that was a year ago! That was the time I came home from Lofoten and you had no stockings for me to change into. You must have been a grand lady to have a pair of stockings to give away.'

'I'm sorry about it,' said Ane Maria, sniveling.

A young relative of hers by name of Teodor broke in: 'Anyway it's none of your business, Edevart.'

'No. But what business of yours is it if August has gold teeth?'

'Will you listen to this little pup!' burst out Teodor. 'He's forgotten the parson turned him down.'

Edevart, pale and wild-eyed: 'Do you know what you are forgetting? You are forgetting that you've got a rupture and have to wear a truss!'

Teodor got up, snorting with rage.

The man of the house, Karolus, pulled him back on the bench. Edevart wouldn't have stopped at anything, he was stirred up and feared no man.

So Teodor hastily concluded by saying that he had his own good teeth anyhow; he hadn't had to visit a blacksmith to get them in his mouth. To which Edevart replied that that was a good thing for him inasmuch as he would never have been able to pay for such teeth as August had.

After this Teodor could not let the matter drop; he continued to wrangle and to abuse Edevart for a long time. Perhaps he might have been briefer and more to the point had not Edevart undertaken to answer everything he said.

From that day on August and Edevart were partners for the home fishing. They caught many cod and haddock and carried them home to the houses where they lived. And it was not their habit to refuse a good cooking-fish to others when they had caught enough for themselves.

More than one housewife blessed them during the long autumn.

When the time came for them to get ready for Lofoten, Edevart asked one day: 'Are you taking a place?'

'No,' said August, 'No one has spoken to me.'

'Aren't you going to say a word to someone yourself?'

'No; not since all the lads are against me.'

'Well, what will you do this winter?'

'I'll go to sea again,' answered August.

'Oh, if only I could go along, too!'

Neither of them went away that winter and Edevart didn't even once go to Lofoten, although he might have taken a place as a full hand. This was a disappointment to his parents. His father was not a fisherman but earned a pittance as supervisor of the long stretch of telegraph wire which ran through this district. And here Edevart had gone back on him and wouldn't be able to contribute anything toward his keep. The lad ought to have thought more of his own good, but now there was nothing to be done about it.

August had begun to purchase furs and hides in the country round about and took Edevart along to carry them home. A day came and the dollars in August's pocket were not so few, whereupon he agreed to pay Edevart the same wages an ordinary hand would get for a winter at Lofoten. It was thus a fair arrangement and Edevart had lost nothing by it. Besides, he learned a great many things from August and looked up to him as a seven seas-sailor and a devil of a fellow.

So they went on buying hides, mostly calfskins, an occasional fleece, and now and then a cowhide. Suddenly an epidemic broke out among the dogs; a strange dog turned up with symptoms of distemper and soon all the dogs in the district were infected. August and Edevart, as the only grown-up men at home, were frequently called upon to despatch an animal—and it was only right that they

should flay the carcass and take the skin as their reward. But trading in hides—was August able to carry on such a business? He was not without some knowledge of it, so he claimed; among his numerous occupations in foreign parts he had even worked for a time on a sheep ranch in Australia.

On towards Lent, August expanded his business; he became a buyer of valuable pelts—beaver, fox and ermine. He got hold of a gun and two traps of different type and even tried a little hunting. Something came of this. It had been a long time now since a shot had been fired up in this part of the country and foxes and beavers were by no means scarce. The glorious day came when August returned home with both a beaver and a silver fox. It was his ambition to trap an ermine; he explained to Edevart that the robes of kings were trimmed with ermine fur. However, these shy creatures were scarce and difficult to catch.

Time passed. They worked on the skins every day. These were spread out on walls or stretched between stakes to dry in the wind, and as they became dry they were sorted out and tied together in bundles. By the time the men came home from Lofoten in the spring, the two comrades had a mass of skins stowed away in barns and sheds, now practically empty of hay. They had no ermine pelts, but one day when the ice had broken up, they rowed out on a hunt for seabirds and were lucky enough to shoot a seal—a rare visitor here in Polden, and that was a good skin to have.

Folk shook their heads at August and his fur business. 'Won't you buy mouse skins as well?' mocked Teodor. August's speculation at any rate was new and untried in these parts and when he tried to rent an eight-oar to transport his skins, Karolus, who was the owner of the boat, said that the voyage ought to be abandoned—August wouldn't make enough to pay for the rent of the

boat. But August knew what he was doing; he had bought each skin for next to nothing, and besides, he had a connection with the great leather dealers, Klem, Hansen & Co. of Trondhjem, the firm whose round stamp appeared on the bluish, oak-tanned shoe-leather so well known all through Nordland—ay, from them August had received definite specifications. And Klem, Hansen & Co. were sending agents north this summer and would operate a concession at the Stokmarknes fair; it was there that August was to deliver his goods. But he had no boat.

August encountered only hostility. There were the other young men now returned from Lofoten with money in their pockets and various possessions. August, he had only bundles of skins in the barns and lofts around on the farms, and he had surely spent the last of his money.

On the day that the eight-oar Lofoten boat was to be laid up in shelter until the fishing season would open again next winter, August tried once more to rent it. But the owner refused. He pardoned himself and said that it was a new and valuable boat; he hadn't even finished paying for it himself—he still owed for the equipment—the sail, the rigging and the anchor. August turned and took a few steps away, then came back and said: 'Will you sell the boat?'

'Sell it? You want to buy it then, perhaps?'

'Yes,' said August.

Karolus stared. 'Ho!—buy it?'

Edevart was present and he, too, stared.

But when Karolus heard that August was the kind of a fellow who could even buy a fully equipped eight-oar, he had something to think about and something to take him around to all the cottages. The whole village talked it over, and for once at least August could lord it over the other young lads of the neighbourhood. What the devil! Was this returned sailor made of money? The owner of

the boat became reasonable. He himself went to August and said: 'I can't part with the eight-oar; it is the thing I make my living with; but I'll rent it to you if you like.'

'No, I'd much rather buy it outright,' August said proudly.

Karolus mildly objected: 'I couldn't agree to that.'

They continued to discuss the matter. What would August do with an eight-oar after the trip was made?

He would get rid of it there at the fair.

'It's a long time before winter and the Lofoten fishing,' said Karolus. 'You wouldn't be able to sell such a big boat in summer.'

No, August admitted that it would be difficult, but he had his reasons. . .

What reasons?

August let it be understood that he was in somewhat of a difficulty at the moment; he had spent all his small change on skins and, under the circumstances, he couldn't pay the rent for the boat.

The man was perplexed. 'But you have money to buy the boat?'

'Ay, that I have,' answered August. 'You're not to repeat what I say, but I still have a rather large bank note, a couple of large bank notes, when it comes to that. I can't pay the rent for your boat till I can get them changed.'

Karolus, completely vanquished: 'Ay, then, don't you see? You can pay me the rent after you get your notes changed at the fair.'

An agreement was reached at this point and the comrades, August and Edevart, loaded their cargo of skins on board, laid in a store of provisions and set sail for Stokmarknes. They were much too small a crew to handle so large a boat, but it was fine weather and a summer's day and they couldn't complain.

Things went well and they were nearly across the Vestfjord. There was a breeze and the sun shone night and day

at this time of the year and they took turns sailing the boat. While one steered the other leaned back against the bales of skins and dozed. While August was navigating he sang and talked English to himself, and when Edevart awoke and looked up, August could have cursed for joy, and began at once to boast about their voyage. Now everything was going splendidly, he bragged. For that matter they could just as well swing out across the broad Atlantic, just as they were!

August had such watery blue eyes; and God knows there wasn't much to him, after all. He gave the impression of being able to perform rather ordinary tasks with his hands and his head, true enough, but he surely seemed to be no master of ingenuity. Yet here he was admiring himself! It was like eating candy to sail along in this lazy fashion, and he was going to earn big money, too!

They had set their course too far north and they saw Hindø in the distance. Here the wind freshened toward nightfall, but as yet there was no sea to speak of. August was at the helm, Edevart asleep. What now—was it blowing up a storm? He was not accustomed to being on board these small Nordland boats and he became sea-sick. Remarkably enough it suddenly began to hail. A white wind rose, the sun was extinguished and as he turned and looked back, he saw that the sky was black. They had come some distance out into the open sea and the weather had become rough—a real hail storm. August waking up Edevart, screamed at him. Edevart sprang up.

'Where are you steering to!' he cried.

'I want to turn around,' answered August, sick and terrified.

Edevart: 'Are you crazy! You can't turn in the wind.'

'I don't know,' said August, completely cowed.

'Slack the sheet!' commanded Edevart. He got the sail down and took two reefs at once.

No, a Lofoten boat was no ship and August simply could not stand upright in one; only sit. He had to be down low; if he had to he could kneel, but even so he was scared to death.

'God Almighty, what's to be the end of this?' he whimpered.

'Throw her over again!' ordered Edevart.

This was done. The boat shipped some water, but righted herself on the wave. It was now a question of getting into Raftsund.

August didn't have much to say now; he looked wild and cried out to Edevart: 'The Lord will surely punish me!'

'Why?' Edevart's face seemed to ask.

'Ay. You see, Edevart, I didn't have enough to pay for the rent of the boat and I lied when I said I would buy it.'

'So!' said Edevart. 'Then you had no money?'

'No,' answered August, 'and now God help us!'

Edevart found fault with the way the boat was being sailed; the sea had risen and they were shipping altogether too much water. 'Go forward and take the tack!' he ordered his comrade and the lad, this sixteen-year-old boy, himself took charge of the tiller. He pulled it to him and shoved it out twice for every wave, causing a burst of spray to whip across August's back, but no water entered the boat.

'You were steering like a clown and getting your skins all wet,' Edevart said with an air of experience. He allowed himself the pleasure of this comment.

'I don't care a hang about the skins if only we get off with our lives,' answered August.

Edevart called out: 'Take a third reef!'

August did so and seemed perfectly willing to obey orders. That was really what he was accustomed to do. Ay,

August had been to sea right enough, just as he had always boasted; had lived the precarious but care-free life of shipboard; had suffered and been patient and happy, celebrating when he went ashore. He had also changed his occupation and manner of living many times. He excused himself with the plea that he had no definite calling in life and was, therefore, a jack-of-all-trades, taking up anything that offered itself. He had tilled the earth even and for that matter had worked in a mine under the earth. That's what he said, in any case, speaking always as if he were ashamed of it—but at heart it might well be boasting. Here he had walked behind the plough; there he had had a job in town. He had often gone to saloons and once in a while to church. Through it all he had been one of the many, so it seemed: a commoner, subordinate always. At times he had experienced glad days; he had been ashore on coasts where clothes weren't needed at all and where one's food could be plucked from the trees. On other occasions he had wandered about in a cold city where a full meal was too expensive for him and where the only meat he could afford was liver. Should people then expect too much of him? Like other lads in a similar predicament, he had to get along on his wits and this he cheerfully admitted. Oh, but August had never killed anyone, no, no, never killed a single soul! All this sounded modest and truthful and it may be that what he said was so. But his swindles he never mentioned until odd times when he happened to be in danger, for then he was afraid.

They took one reef after another and still the boat scudded along before the wind and hardly answered the helm at all. August sat at the tack, pale and wet, and now he had more than one matter to take up with God. There were these gold teeth. He confessed that he hadn't paid for them, only a small down-payment, and then had fled from town and country. 'I wish they were at the bottom

of the sea!' he said, and made as if to snatch them out of his mouth.

'It would be better if you went to work and bailed the boat!' said Edevart, like a grown-up man. Now that his comrade appeared so broken he assumed a superior air and sat there at the tiller in the position of head-man.

'What should I bail for?' said August in despair. 'Things are getting worse, not better. I see no way out of this mess.'

'You are a downright fool!' cried Edevart. 'Can't you see that I'm making for shelter?'

Ay, August was again obedient and bailed the boat as well as he could, but his thoughts were far away. He had probably heard tell of a life after death and he wanted to fill his last moments on earth with confessing his sins and praying to God. 'That's all I can think of just now!' he said, concluding his confession.

They kept sailing ahead for about an hour and it was not far from midnight. The sea rose and the sun was nowhere to be seen. It had ceased hailing, but the sky was very dark and that meant another deluge. In this semi-gloom navigation was dangerous; neither of the lads was familiar with the sea-currents here and Edevart had to steer as best he could, directing his course toward the land on his right. They caught a faint glimpse of Hindø. It was a question of finding a break in the coast, a cove, or some kind of a natural haven. The land far away to the left, the mountains of Lofoten, would have offered a better shelter, but the direction of the wind was wrong for such a course.

'We aren't far from land now,' said August. Perhaps he had taken new hope; anyway he had confessed his sins and was easier in his mind.

Suddenly it thundered. Edevart cast a hurried glance over his shoulder. Hailstones again rattled down on the bales of skins. It was another squall and the wind whined

against the mast. Edevart did not ease the sheet quickly enough and the boat leaned far over. A moment later the hail came crashing down.

August now lost his courage completely and cried with face upturned: 'Dear Lord, save us! If it means anything to you, I still have ten hundred sins to——'

'Bail the boat!' ordered Edevart.

August didn't hear. 'There was the time when we were on shore-leave in that nigger country,' he cried despondently. 'The time we met her and the four of us went after her.'

'Bail the boat!' screamed Edevart.

August fumbled with the bailing-bucket, but hadn't much success with using it. He was absorbed in his hazy recollections and shook his head as though paralysed. 'We're sinking,' said he.

They were close to land. Edevart, to his terror, saw that he had not reckoned on the driftage. 'Let go a reef!' he cried out in his danger. He wanted to give the boat a little sail so that he could guide her back away from the breakers.

August must surely have grasped the situation; he did as he was told and the boat answered the helm. A quarter of an hour went by; the boat was half full of water and August ever so little of his own accord began to bail. Had Edevart been able to release the tiller, he surely would have cast overboard some of the packages of skins; but it would have taken time to cut the lashings and he dared not mention it to August who had now lost all initiative. Instead, to encourage his comrade, he said: 'That's right, just keep on bailing.'

A little later, a rift appeared in the island and that was a relief. Further along a new rift appeared; it opened itself into a gap, a dark hole into the island. Edevart quickly resolved to alter his course. He pulled the tiller to him as far as it would come and swung the boat around

and into the opening. It was a daring play, for they might have struck in there and come to grief; neither of them knew their way and luck was all that saved them. Edevart's nervous courage had almost deserted him; he was no longer capable of wrestling with the elements and his face was ashen.

When August saw land on both sides of him, he took a new lease on life; he bailed with a will, gripped the boat-hook and sat poised to protect himself in case the boat struck a reef. 'When I say heave, let go the anchor!' cried Edevart, with forethought.

They had no occasion to heave the anchor; they were as lucky as fools and did not run aground. The dark channel which had bored its way into the island swung around on itself and ended in a little bay. A boat lay there ahead of them, a four-oar, in calm water, moored with an ordinary anchor. There was no wind here and at last they even had to take to the oars and row in order to get in to the beach.

They were saved.

Edevart could crow now if he liked, but he made no greater fuss than usual. His mouth was bloodless; it looked as though it were frozen stiff and he couldn't speak. August did what had to be done: carried the line ashore and made fast the boat, bailed it dry and spread out the sail. When all this was done Edevart took a grip on himself and said, in order to appear at ease: 'Those niggers you were talking about, what niggers were those?'

'Ay, it was in warm countries,' August replied shyly, and shook his head. 'But that has nothing to do with us now!'

Edevart would have liked him to go into the matter more fully and not pass it off so casually, but his esteem for his comrade restrained him; furthermore he wasn't up to hearing more just now. He was no longer grown-up and sure of himself as he had been while navigating the boat.

As soon as he stepped ashore he began to feel wretchedly ill; the tension he had been under relaxed and he began to vomit. Here August came in handy and helped him over the first painful moments.

'Do you feel rotten?' he asked.

'No,' answered Edevart and threw up.

It seemed to be a long way to houses and people. There was a little cabin near the shore, but the door was boarded up. August was anxious to break in, but Edevart objected. It turned out that they sat down in the shelter of the cabin, ate some of their provisions and waited for morning. Edevart braced up for he wanted to get a little better line on his comrade's confessions. But August made evasive answers to all his questions. However, Edevart wasn't a sixteen-year-old for nothing; he couldn't forget the nigger girl.

'What did you do to her?' he asked.

'What did we do to her? Nothing.'

'Ay, didn't you say the four of you went after her?'

'No. Did I say four? You mustn't ask. She was only a young one; so you can see for yourself that we didn't do anything to her. It was one we met on the road.'

'Did she scream?' asked Edevart.

August didn't answer this, but said instead: 'She wasn't any bigger than Ragna back home. But in hot countries the girls are grown-up when they are children. They get married when they are Ragna's age. It's wonderful when you think of people in the hot countries. So! Now the sun is coming out again!'

August went down to the boat and carried the wettest of the skins ashore to dry. He had confessed his sins and was a free man again. Now he set to work as though nothing had happened. They left the island that night in fine weather. There was no wind and they had to row. But they found a breeze and set sail as soon as they got into the open sea.

CHAPTER TWO

AT the fair there was no end of traffic and din. Here in the harbour lay many vessels large and small and many boats, and more were arriving night and day. On shore crowds swarmed in the streets; a couple of lads from Namdal had had a little too much to drink and were looking for a fight. Each man was his own policeman.

Edevart found the place both entertaining and instructive and, while August was delivering his cargo of skins, he strolled about and inspected everything. Here were booths filled with goods both cheap and expensive, and here wares piled high and far more valuable than any of those at Lofoten. And here too were tight-rope walkers, hand-organs, wild animals, bowling-alleys, street-hawkers, merry-go-rounds, gipsies who told fortunes, shops selling coffee and soda water, the world's fattest woman and the calf with two heads. . .

And here, as usual, strolled the venerable old Papst, the Jew watch-dealer with all those mysterious pockets in his overcoat. A remarkable man.

Edevart loitered in the vicinity of the old Jew for a time, not because he ever dreamed he could buy anything from him, but simply because it was such a glorious sight to see all those shining pocket-watches. 'How rich he must be to have so many watches!' thought Edevart.

Old Papst had settled down in Norway for good, although it was likely that he might have gone elsewhere to greater advantage. He had travelled about Nordland for almost a generation, had gone from town to town, sought the fishing posts and turned up wherever there was a fair. He spoke excellent Norwegian, and knew all the words,

if he did utter them with a bit of a foreign twist. All things considered, Papst was well looked upon by everyone. Everyone knew the fat little man with his many watch-chains strung across his broad belly; he hailed young and old and had gold watches for rich folk and cheap silver watches for poor. He used different methods of procedure during his transactions, all depending upon who the customer was.

To the young people who stood about him and looked with large eyes at his display, Papst might say: 'I have a good timepiece for you, too; see here, be good enough to hold it in your hand.' When the youngster had learned the price and put aside all thought of doing business, Papst would ask: 'How much have you?' The youngster might mention half the price of the watch or even a third of it. Papst would not give up at this, of course not; he became friendly and his heart filled with sympathy. It seemed as though he might, in this particular instance, go to extremes and loan the lad a little money himself in order to put him in a position to buy the watch. Ay, now and then, Papst took a part-payment and let the balance stand over until the following year. 'You come of good folks and are an honest man,' said he. 'You will pay a poor old Jew!' The lad, for his own part, could not betray such great, such an adventurous confidence, and would display a sense of honour he surely had little use for in his daily life; he would pay the balance next year. Indeed it scarcely ever happened that Papst was fooled by a lad.

Thus the old Jew watch-hawker got along and managed his itinerant business year in and year out with the same quiet dignity. He cheated when he could but when caught, would turn around and cheerfully rectify his fraud, although occasionally, to be sure, with a new one.

He has a keen eye for the pompous little whippersnappers who critically examine a watch and pretend that they are connoisseurs—these Papst takes particular delight in

deceiving. Self-important and familiar, they come to him, calling him Moses. 'Well, Moses, have you got a good watch for me to-day?' Papst takes a watch from his pocket and holds it up to the light in front of his customer. 'Look at this one,' he says. The man looks it over, opens it and asks if it is any good. 'Good?' answers Papst, 'I carry one just like it in my own pocket; see for yourself!' And he pulls one of his own watches out of his pocket and compares it with the first. Then it comes to the price. Papst quibbles over this as long as possible with everyone, but with whippersnappers who know all about watches, he quibbles twice as long. Let him be offered half the amount he mentions, and his sorrowful face becomes longer than ever, confronted by so much wickedness in the world. He puts the watch back. No, no business to-day.

Ah, but the customer may know about Papst from hearsay; he shows up again later on, and Papst is sure to recognize him. 'Make me another offer!' says he. The man pulls out, let us say, some silver money, but—'No, no and no!' says Papst, and takes out the watch again and shows it off, opens and closes it and puts it back in his pocket. But when the man starts to leave, Papst heaves a deep sigh over all the wickedness to be found in the world and concludes the sale. He is selling at a loss; that's what he is doing—this kind of thing will lead him to ruin and the grave, but there's no help for it! When the man has paid him the money, Papst takes out the watch and delivers it, shiny and new, with fine engraving on the case. The watch is ticking lustily—oh, but it is not the same watch! Papst has dug into one of his mysterious pockets and has got hold of another; it looks precisely the same as the first, but it is a cheaper one.

Now, occasionally, it turns out that the whippersnapper is really as shrewd as Papst, especially if his suspicions have been aroused; he might even be able to catch the Jew in some shady dealing and set up a howl. If so, then Papst

shakes his head mournfully and says: 'There, you see, I never knew any one to have sharper eyes than you. I didn't notice it myself. But *you* noticed it!' And in order to set his customer's mind at ease, he gives him his own watch from his own vest-pocket, which is a perfect guarantee. But the man really walks away with a third watch, a very common affair!

Here at the fair Edevart saw the Armenian again, the organ-grinder from home; and the Hungarian was with him still. He ran across them one afternoon down by one of the docks; they had taken up their position on a crowded thoroughfare and the music and the toy-theatre were both going full blast.

The two men had not changed beyond recognition during the three years since their appearance in the village back home; the only difference was that the Armenian now had two black eyes and thus was now entirely blind. Poor man, and an organ-grinder in a strange country; that was his fate!

Folk there were who felt sorry for him and dropped coins into the toy beggar-boy's cup. Children and young people flocked about the marvellous hurdy-gurdy with Napoleon and his generals in their brightly-coloured uniforms, trimmed with gold.

'I know them,' whispered Edevart to the man at his side. 'I've seen them before!' And he turned directly to the musician and asked: 'Have you become blind?'

'Yes, blind,' answered the man and sorrowfully shook his head.

'I don't believe it,' said Edevart. No, for he noticed that the good Armenian had looked at him sharply when he asked the question.

Now the Hungarian stepped in with his loud ranting and began his old assault upon his comrade; harsh abuse and blows. Horror ran through the audience; the children

fell back and cried for the grown folk to step in. Excellent! Everyone here was his own policeman and two Namdalers, who were in the vicinity, came up and laid rough hands on the Hungarian. They tossed him up above their heads and yelled indecently that he was only a little brat in diapers and ought to be dumped in the sea. Oh, well, two men were too much even for the Hungarian; he struggled a moment and tried to wriggle away from them, but he soon gave that up and began to plead for deliverance. The Namdalers were merciful. When they had completely vanquished him they set him down, gave him a kick and let him skulk away. They stood where they were and watched him run; they laughed and there was no limit to their boasting—they ought to have ground him to a pulp and fed him to the chickens! The Namdalers now turned their attention to the man who had been assaulted and waited for him to give them his thanks. But oh, no, he had no thanks to offer; he stood whimpering and wiping his cheek.

'Did you ever see such funny blood?' said the Namdalers to each other. 'It looks like it had blue in it!'

'That isn't blood!' said Edevart. 'It's something he puts on his cheek himself. I've seen these fellows before.'

'Isn't it blood?'

'No. And he isn't blind either,' said Edevart.

A voice from the crowd supported him: 'No, he isn't blind. I have seen these rascals up north in Finmark; they played the same trick before to get money out of us.'

The Namdalers strode over to the man and looked at him.

'Aren't you blind?' they asked.

The man snivelled and answered: 'Yes, blind. *Gewiss.*'

One of the men took out his knife and flourished it under the blind man's nose; the latter blinked and jumped back terror-stricken. No, he couldn't stand the test! With great haste he slammed his barrel-organ shut and hurried

away. The Namdalers didn't touch him; but they showed signs of embarrassment because they had let him go and because they had got into something ridiculous that was not worth a fight. Had they not planned to throw the crook into the sea? They stood there at a loss and stuck their hands into their pockets and drew them out again.

'Get away with you!' they commanded. 'You're no more blind than we are!'

"Yes,' the Armenian mumbled. 'Almost blind, very blind.'

'Along with you, do you hear?' And that was that.

Their entire career at the fair completely ruined, the Armenian and his partner disappeared from the place. They must have made their way across the Island of Hadsel to Melbø, playing at all the farms, peddling their art and making their journey by short stops. What else should they do? They were human and they crawled like the rest of us; they went along according to their circumstances and they lived until they died. . .

As for Edevart, there were further experiences and further business relations with August for him. They had parted that morning aboard the boat where they had spent the night and Edevart had not seen August since. He did not see him again until the following afternoon and then he was drunk and in high spirits. Oh, that August! here was your sailor-lad on shore-leave again!

He came sauntering down the street where Edevart stood eyeing Papst and his watches. August was very happy and red in the face and talking English to himself. He was wearing a shiny gold ring that he had bought himself and he had some sort of silken finery about his neck which certainly had been intended for the ladies; at any rate there was a fringe around it.

When he caught sight of Edevart he waved to him and asked: 'Have you had anything to eat? Come on, and we'll go to a place I know.'

They went to a concession where bread and butter and

hot sausages were sold, and sat down. A woman and a girl were in charge of the business. August felt at home here; he patted the girl on the arm and called her his sweetheart. 'Come on with my bottle, Mattea!' he said. Then he turned to Edevart and told him to order all the food he could think of. 'There's no food in the world too good for you,' he said. 'And Mattea, my sweetheart here, will hustle it in for you, *you bet!*' he added in English.

And Mattea brought food and a bottle of liquor.

As they ate, August explained where he had been. Ay, he had got rid of his skins to Klem, Hansen & Co. of Trondhjem and then had felt a desire to celebrate for a day or so. He had run across some wonderful friends of his.

Edevart asked: 'How did things go with the skins? What did you get for them?'

'A lot!' answered August; he hadn't imagined he could possibly get so much for them! And then he went on to explain that now he had become engaged, it might turn out that he wouldn't have time to sail the boat home.

Edevart was startled: 'But I can't sail it home alone!'

'Not alone, no. I didn't have that in mind, anyway. I'll buy the boat, you see.'

'But it isn't for sale, is it?'

August whistled: 'Never mind about that.'

They ate and drank and chatted, August humming now and then. Edevart had never before in his life been so lavishly entertained. If only those back home in poverty-stricken Polden could see them now, seated in the lap of luxury.

'Ay, but what do you want with the boat?' asked Edevart.

August had not given this much thought. He wanted to buy it merely to get out of sailing it home and tearing himself away from his sweetheart. Maybe, too, the anxiety occasioned by the voyage down was still in his mind. At

any event, he didn't want to be bothered with practical affairs just now; he had his own ideas when it came to work and play. 'Look at Mattea,' he said. 'A beautiful girl! She's worth the fat gold ring I gave her. Isn't it fat?'

The formerly silent August became garrulous; his tongue wagged more freely than ever before—the drinks were working! His thoughts came faster and he laughed with his gold teeth and was delighted.

Two young lads entered the booth and August began to show off before them. He began to tell about other places in the world, about the warm countries. Take India, for example, out there they went about with rings encircling their ankles, big rings of pure gold without a clasp or a lock of any kind, forged right there on their bare skin. Besides that, these rings were set with diamonds and on some were little bells that jingled. But once she broke her leg and they had to file the ring in two to get it off when they came to set the bone!

'Come on over here and have a dram with your coffee,' he called to the two visitors. He semed to crave others to share his conviviality and didn't want to be the only one in high spirits, and Edevart was not much of a drinker. 'Skoal lads! I am a widely-travelled man, you must know! I've been around the world and I can well understand that Calcutta and Sydney and such places are strange names to you. Anyway, here I sit right on this stool where you see me. What do you think brought me to town? Skins! Ay, here you see a business man. And I dare go further and say I'm a Dealer in Skins. You may be sure, too, that skins don't exactly grow on trees. Just ask my partner sitting here what kind of a cargo we came in with. That's right, Edevart,' he said suddenly. 'I want to pay you off!'

Edevart, at a loss: 'It can't be much this time; I got so much before.'

August drew forth a fat pocket-book and counted out

the money and was not tight-fisted. 'Here,' he said, 'This is what you have earned, so now you shall have it!'

Edevart thanked him, more bashfully than ever, and said that it was too much; he had received far more than was coming to him.

'Ay,' said August, 'you can see how I grudge it to you; that's my way of showing it!' He called Mattea to him and asked if she had one more bottle.

'No,' she answered.

'Come, bring us another bottle,' he begged, and pinched her arm. When she complained, he pinched her all the harder and said: 'So! The louder you holler the worse I shall get!'

'Let me be!' she cried, red in the face.

But he did not let her be, not by any means, until she had promised to bring him another bottle. He handled her roughly without the trace of a caress; it was as though, compared with himself, she were some insignificant thing, like one of his ribs. A rare relationship between two people betrothed! 'And now get us some cigars,' he said. 'Extra good cigars for all of us here!'

One of the young lads appeared to be getting a little better acquainted with the girl; they made eyes at each other and Mattea leaned one of her hands with more than necessary tenderness on his shoulder when she reached after something on the table. August noticed nothing, as he was becoming more and more intoxicated. He became fanciful and silly, became a rich man and a lunatic. He began to tell about a fight on board a schooner—was it the truth or the workings of his imagination? The Malay had used his knife and had almost slashed the mate to death; but then August had driven a marlin-spike into the Malay's belly——

He fell silent.

'That's the stuff!' declared one of the young lads. 'But what happened then?'

August delayed before presenting the final scene. 'Hold on a bit, till I get it straight in my memory. What happened then? Why, he rolled around on the deck, may be seven or eight times, and when he got up again the spike was still sticking in his belly.'

'Oh!' said the listeners.

'Ay,' said August and was himself overcome. He shook his head—had he perhaps outrun his own imagination?

'But did you kill him?' asked one of the lads, worried.

August leaned back; Mattea stood there listening. He didn't want to sound a brute and a murderer. 'No, I didn't kill him,' he answered. 'A Malay and a Mohammedan like him doesn't die from a piece of iron in his belly. No, he went with the spike sticking into him till we got to port where there was a doctor.'

'Why didn't he pull it out himself?'

'No; don't you see, for then he would have bled to death. . .'

More stories and a lot of crazy talk all through the afternoon. Time passed. Edevart was thinking about practical affairs and asked: 'Did you write home about the boat yet?'

'No,' answered August. 'I'm not a man to write about it; I simply telegraph, express wire and answer collect and everything. No' he continued 'We who have been out in the world, we use the telegraph. Mattea, let us have some coffee.'

But before coffee was brought, August suddenly felt bad, became deathly pale and had to go outside. That August, he was certainly no seasoned toper, that was easy to see! He simply couldn't stand strong liquor, and he only cut loose on some special occasion. Ay, and after a few drinks that carefree lad's head was swimming. He had ploughed and harrowed the sea and had also reaped its harvests; during each shore-leave he sowed himself once

more. So it was. He admitted it many times himself and never tried to hide it.

He had time to mumble: 'I'll be back again before long!' Then he rushed out.

Edevart followed him outside and said: 'You should go aboard and lie down for a while.'

'Lie down? What are you thinking of? No!'

'If you lie down, it will pass away quickly.'

August, stubborn and stupid: 'What will pass away? I'm not drunk. It was that cigar——'

Edevart: 'Oughtn't you to sleep a bit? I'd like it if you would!'

August, bull-headedly: 'Sleep! in the middle of the day? Not to be thought of!' No, August was against such novel ideas, and like all other drunken folk, insisted that he was sober. He was absolutely sober, extremely sober; it was simply that wretched cigar——

He braced up considerably, however, out there in the open air; the colour returned to his face and he stood straight on his own two legs. They both went inside again.

And such a sight as met their eyes! That young devil of a lad and Mattea were standing off in a corner and hugging each other brazenly!

August seized a stool and hurled it at them, but it hit the ceiling and fell back on the table, shattering cups and glasses. Then he picked up a bread knife from the table and made a leap for the couple in the corner. The effect was immediate: the young lad, terror-stricken, released his lady and flew through the door, his comrade was not far behind him. It seemed a bit empty in the room then, there was no one to cut loose upon and August stood staring at his sweetheart, a disarmed sword-swinger, speechless and stupid.

'It wasn't anything!' said Mattea, trying to smile.

The proprietress was alarmed and came rushing in

from the kitchen; she demanded quiet in her house. She wouldn't be so severe as to throw August out, that good customer for her smuggled *brændevin;* but now she must insist that he pay his check and leave. He could come again later. 'Let me have the knife!' she said.

August still looked as though he would like to kill some one, but little by little he gave in; he wasn't on a bear-hunt now; and finally he delivered over his victorious sabre to the proprietress.

Mattea was talking again: 'It wasn't anything, you understand,' she said. 'I hardly know him, he is from Ofoten, a skipper's son and his name is Nils.'

'Yes, but—,' stammered August.

'We weren't doing anything; we were only talking,' continued Mattea. 'We were hardly doing so much as anything.'

'Didn't he kiss you? I saw that!'

'No, no! Are you crazy!' cried Mattea. 'That was only fooling.' At length Mattea talked as though she had hardly been in the corner with Nils at all, and August was completely bewildered. Well enough, he had only a few eyes in his head, two eyes to be exact, but he could see with both of them! Meanwhile Mattea fussed about him; talked to him sweetly and humbly and made him sit down again while he paid his check. When he ordered a new bottle to take along he got it and when he put his arm around her and asked for a tender favour, he got that too. Mattea could not have been sweeter than she was. And August's heart was eased. But when he got up to go, his suspicions returned and he insisted that she should renounce Nils and everyone else in the world.

'Yes,' she hastened to assure him, 'I surely will, and that you can believe!'

'Ay, for if you don't then you can give me back the ring,' he said.

She made as if to pull off the ring then and there and

began to cry ever so little. Her capitulation made August feel tender again; he was on the verge of tears himself and said: 'You can keep the ring for now!'

He turned to Edevart. 'Isn't it so?' he asked, 'she has promised me her love and devotion for ever?'

Edevart felt honoured to have a part to play in the affair and answered: 'Ay, to that I have been a solemn witness.'

'Yes, you can die on that!' answered Mattea and wept with emotion. 'I shall never again in all this world so much as look at him for a single minute.'

'Then you can keep the ring,' repeated August generously.

But Edevart must surely have considered his betrothal a bit uncertain. While they were standing in the telegraph office he quietly asked if it wouldn't be better to wait over till to-morrow with the telegram. 'Or what do you think yourself?' he said, fearful lest he vex a man who had been around the world.

'No, I'm going to buy the boat,' answered August decisively. 'You heard what she promised, didn't you?'

'But how am I to get back home?'

'On the steamer,' August replied. He had scribbled on many blanks in the meantime and at last made out a suitable message and delivered it to the operator and paid for both wire and answer. He was fairly sober now.

Did August go down to the boat then and take a little rest? No, and once again, no! He was a free man, had time to waste and money burned in his pocket. Not that he had it in his mind to throw his fortune away, and to buy things he didn't need. But he did want, for example, to treat himself to a dress-coat which he really ought to have to wear at his wedding. Furthermore, he had long needed a revolver.

'What's that?' asked Edevart.

'Don't you know? Something to shoot with. A pistol.'

'Wouldn't it be better to have a shot-gun? No, I don't know.'

'No, I want something to carry in my pocket. I really should have had a revolver back there instead of that knife, then you would have seen!' August explained that there were various other things he needed: here he was wearing a watch-chain whose gold had all worn off. In foreign countries even the meanest sea-captain or mate wouldn't have one like it—away with it and let him get a new one. He would show that Mattea what kind of a man he was! And then he had also run across an accordion in one of the booths, one with two rows of keys and wide silk bands—oh, a gorgeous instrument and it appealed to him.

'But can you play?' asked Edevart.

August answered grandly: 'Ay, what do you think?'

Edevart was not convinced. But what a devil of a fellow that August would be if he really could play!

Edevart was not thinking of buying any such fancy things as August figured on, but he, too, had his plans: a blouse of many colours, with lacing across the chest; a cap with a patent-leather visor—those were the things he thought he could afford. Dress-goods for a frock for each of his sisters he wanted to take back with him—the youngsters were always so cute when they tried to express their thanks—they simply took your hand and stood speechless with embarrassment.

That night after Edevart had turned in, August came aboard and crept under the sail where he lay. Sure enough, he had bought both the accordion and the gold chain and he offered Edevart a cigar from a full box.

'Did you get the dress-coat?' asked Edevart.

August slapped his knee and cried: 'That I forgot! Well, well, it won't be too late to-morrow.' But what a wretched fair this was, he said, compared to the ones he was used to; a revolver was not to be had anywhere!

In the morning he went ashore, determined to buy the coat and then come back at once—for this was the last day of the fair. Good!

Edevart waited behind, but August did not return. He waited until past noon; then he, too, went ashore and began to wander about. He halted as usual near the Jew watch-monger.

'Where are you from?' asked Papst.

Edevart told him.

'Whose son are you?'

Edevart named his parents, but Papst did not know them. He asked what the lad was doing here, how old he was, what his name was, and if he were going to Lofoten next winter. Edevart gave an account of himself. When he was finished, Papst turned his attention to others.

August was not to be seen. Edevart went to Mattea's coffee booth and learned that August had been there twice that day, but had gone away again. He was all dressed up and looked grand indeed in a black dress-coat and a new gold chain, she stated. Edevart waited for him there for a good while, but finally went out.

The merchants were bustling about and packing up their unsold wares in preparation for their leaving for home. They offered to sell Edevart countless articles at bargain prices, a neckerchief, a pair of suspenders, a pipe stem. 'Come and look at this before I pack it up; be so good as to look at this, a first-class razor; you could make good use of it, I notice. Take it for what you will give for it, for next to nothing!' Edevart was begining to grow a light down on his cheeks and he bought the razor, but he blushed with embarrassment as he did so.

August came aboard toward evening. Ay, grand he was in his new coat, but he was in low spirits. What in the world could have happened? Whatever it was, he was suffering a bit from the after-effects of his debauch. Edevart

asked at once if he had received an answer to his telegram. No. Hadn't he asked after it? No, not that either.

Edevart looked at him; the blue in his eyes had become thin and downright blurred and his face was as pale as a ghost's. Edevart fairly ordered him to get some sleep.

'I ran across some fellows playing cards,' said August.

'So, and they beat you?'

'Ay, they were regular fiends. But I didn't lose so very much, after all. What I wanted to say was: were you looking for me to-day?'

'Ay, and I asked Mattea after you, too.'

'H'm. And what did she say?'

'She said you were very grand; one of the grandest persons she had ever seen in the world.'

'Ay,' said August. 'When I buy something, then you may be sure it's first class.'

He told Edevart the price he had paid for the gold watch-chain. It was a fancy price and Edevart wanted to have another look at the chain. But he was denied that pleasure. 'No,' said August. 'I'd be better off if I'd never bought it, for now it's gone—?'

'Gone? Gambled away?'

'Ay. But I still have that watch of mine,' said August and turned away, his mouth trembling a little.

'You must go to bed,' commanded Edevart.

For the second time August ignored him. He had reached the point where sleep no longer meant anything to him; he was too worn out after his debauch, too deeply discouraged.

But when Edevart awoke next morning, fatigue had overcome his comrade none the less; there he sat, pale as a corpse and fully dressed, asleep on one of the thwarts.

The vessels and boats had all slipped out of the harbour in the grey light of dawn; a small steamship lay alongside the pier and was taking on passengers and

package freight. Perhaps Edevart wanted to go aboard himself, but decided that first of all he would sneak ashore and ask about the telegram. It had come; he signed for it and ran back to the boat with it. August was sitting on the same thwart, but was awake now and in the act of counting his money.

'Here's the telegram,' said Edevart.

August answered: 'Well, I don't care anything about that.'

'Don't you want to see what it says?'

'No. Throw it into the sea.'

'You act like a fool!' thought Edevart. He looked over toward the little steamship and said: 'Isn't that the steamer I'm to take?'

August merely sighed and sat brooding.

'For I've nothing more to keep me here,' continued Edevart and began to gather together his small packages.

'There's no hurry,' said August.

'No hurry?'

August suddenly tore open the telegram and read, or at least seemed to read it. 'It's just as I thought!' he immediately exclaimed. 'Old Man Karolus thinks he can charge me a fancy price for his boat! Just look at this!'

Edevart took the telegram and then he, too, spelled through its contents, but his view of the matter was that here they had been offered the eight-oar at a very reasonable price, considering that it was new and fully equipped. 'No,' said August. 'We'd better sail the boat back home again—deliver it together.'

This was quite another thing and Edevart was far from being against it, very far indeed. August had come down to earth again, and was sensible at last.

During the course of the day he came even further down to earth; he became, indeed totally deflated: Mattea had gone! When the two comrades went for a bit of hot food,

they found her booth deserted; in the kitchen were only bare walls and a cold cook-stove, the woman gone, Mattea gone.

August, wildly: 'What!—did you ever see such a thing!'

Edevart said they seemed to have gone.

August: 'Gone? Let's go out and find them.'

They went out and hunted, August still carrying the accordion, for he had intended to play for Mattea. They were unable to make inquiries of the neighbours, for there were no longer any neighbours; almost all the booths were forsaken. They searched the entire fairgrounds and met but very few folk. They went down to the pier and now even the little steamship had sailed.

August, poor lad, took things so to heart that he needed consolation; now and then he halted and seemed unable to move. Edevart said: 'Oh, well, perhaps it was the best thing for you, I don't know; but when it turns out that she was such a——'

August made no reply.

'But she even took your ring!' Edevart cried suddenly.

'Where is she from, do you know?' asked August darkly.

'No, how should I know! Don't you know yourself?'

'Happy journey to the ring! But that isn't the worst of it,' said August. 'Yesterday she got that watch of mine!'

Edevart, thunderstruck: 'No, you're only fooling!'

August was not fooling; how could he possibly fool about a thing like that. He was more nearly stunned. It was Edevart who had to take care of laying in the necessary provisions for the home trip, and to assume the responsibilities of leadership again; the other lad was good for nothing.

But August's misery was gradually dissipated by the strenuous work that had to be done. They had a fair breeze through Hadselfjord, but then that died down and they were forced to row with heavy oars the entire length of

Raftsund. For August this was a bitter trial, he rowed until the sweat dripped from him; he peeled off one garment after another and when, at last, they were to have their evening meal he lay back in the boat, exhausted.

'Haven't you a dram you can take?' said Edevart. 'I have heard that that helps.'

But August was no drunkard; he couldn't brace himself up after a debauch by taking more drinks; he couldn't even think of that way out of his difficulty without being sick to his stomach.

Suddenly August asks: 'Why should I be going home?'

After a little, Edevart answers: 'Why should we be going home? First of all to deliver the boat.'

'Ay, so you may say, but not I.'

'How's that?'

August leans upon his elbow and answers in desperation: 'Ay, now you shall know; I can't pay the rent for the boat.'

Edevart is speechless; for a long time he is quiet. But August continues to prattle. Foolish, excited chatter. 'What are you looking at me for? It is as I say; I can't meet the rent.'

Edevart said cuttingly: 'And you who would even buy the boat!'

'Ay,' said August. 'But that was then. Can't you get that through your head? Then I could have both bought the boat and paid for it.'

'That I don't believe,' Edevart might have said, but he was silent. What was he to think of his comrade? Surely he had some misgivings; August had cut too grand a figure! After all, what had he made on the cargo of skins? Not so very much, no fortune; merely a pocket-book fat with notes of low denomination; nothing to keep him in gold chains and finger rings for the rest of his life.

'Have *you* any money?' asked August.

'Who, me? What should I have?'

'You've got to help me. You can have that coat of mine.'

'I haven't enough for that,' said Edevart.

They counted his money and August said: 'Ay, you've got enough here. Now you can take the coat!'

Edevart: 'You mustn't be giving away your new coat for such a price!'

August, happy-go-lucky and generous again: 'You really need it more than I do.'

Now he would come back from his voyage humbly enough, he who had meant to lord it over the home lads. Ay, now that dream was over. Nevertheless, August began ever so little to get his good humour back; now that he was relieved of the greatest strain of all—the rent for the boat. And besides that, he still had his gold ring and his accordion intact, and these were not the meanest things in the world to show off with there in that destitute little village of theirs. August suddenly got his appetite back and said he would see what kind of provisions Edevart had got hold of at the fair. Ay, August had pulled himself together. Along toward morning, too, when they came out upon the broad expanse of Vestfjorden, they found a good breeze all the way and put aside the oars.

'What do you expect to do this summer?' asked Edevart.

'Oh, something will turn up!' answered August cheerfully. 'What do you ask for?'

'I don't know what I'm going to do myself,' answered Edevart.

August fell to thinking; he was at the tack and had nothing particular to attend to; he looked as though he were taking a nap. But then he said: 'What will I do this summer? H'm, you're not worrying about me, are you, Edevart? You needn't do that!'

Edevart was by no means convinced that the whole world lay open to his comrade, and he kept silent.

Suddenly August began to wash his hands in the sea; then he carefully dried them on his trousers, snatched up his accordion, put his fingers inside the silk straps and began to play a rousing march. Edevart could not restrain a shout:

'A miracle, so then you really can play!'

August spat into the sea and answered: 'Ay, but you needn't blab about it at home.'

Edevart was proud indeed of his comrade who had never once mentioned that he could play; he was the most remarkable man in the world, a fool, a madman, perhaps —but after all, a lord among men. Could any one ever really understand him? Had he not behaved wretchedly beyond belief and whined with fear over a hailstorm! And had he not confessed many sins and misdeeds which he had committed during his roving life? But here he sat now, this same man, and played the most gorgeous dance music. To cap the climax, he sang a ballad in English—oh, great were the gifts of the man!

'I've played for high and low in my time,' said August.

'Where did you learn?'

August ignored the question and continued: 'Once I played for a king.'

'You don't mean that!'

'The king of Burma. He was black and had long tushes; many thousand man-killers stood round about him. But he and I became great friends and then one day he said to me, said he: "Come, August, play a dance for me!" '

'What was his name?'

'Caphavaripeilinglog.'

'What kind of a name is that? That's a funny one!'

'Ay, that was his name,' said August proudly. 'Caphavaripeilinglog. And you should have seen some of the rings he had in his ears! They hung right down to his shoulders and were made from the human teeth of all his enemies. I gave him my accordion as a gift.'

'Did you give your accordion away?'

August smiled cunningly: 'Well, this much I'll tell you, Edevart; I didn't give it away for nothing. I got many chests full.'

Edevart's face went blank: 'Many chests full of what, for instance?'

'That you should not ask, for I'm not one of those people who like to brag,' answered August. 'And I wouldn't like you to go telling it around town. But the chests, they are still in the capital city of Burma and are waiting for the day when I shall come and fetch them away.'

Edevart: 'Some of that isn't really true, is it, August?'

'What about it isn't true? Have I ever lied to you before? Will you believe me when I show you these keys?' asked August, and took from his pocket a huge bunch of keys. There were eight of them and a corkscrew on the ring.

Edevart was speechless. This, too, August had been concealing all the time: that he had eight treasure-chests waiting for him out there in Burma. This was the first time Edevart had ever seen the keys. He gave in.

CHAPTER THREE

IN the poor little village everything seemed at a standstill. No one showed any enterprise, no one made any progress, the inhabitants simply lived from hand to mouth. Wherever there was a tiny patch of fertile ground, there hay or potatoes or barley grew; in summer the cattle were out in the pasture, in winter they stood in their stalls—it was all so eternal and so changeless. Children learned exactly what their parents had to teach them, nothing less, nothing more; and the days went by and life went by. When the men had gathered in their petty autumn harvests at home, and rowed out to Lofoten for the winter fishing, then each had done his best; the intervals were without significance; what were they to turn to, what was there to do? Oh, they were so shiftless!—time-killers one and all. They went around from cottage to cottage to pass the time of day with each other, tired, sleepy, hungry. For the latest news they went to church.

In the neighbouring settlements a meagre but certain revenue came in each spring when the sloops and ships arrived from Lofoten with cargoes of fish to be dried on the rocks along the beach. And then young and old alike went out on the ledges and dried the fish and earned their little bit—a welcome coin or two to spend on flour and coffee. Yet here in Polden nothing whatever had been done to clear the turf and heather from the ledges to make a proper drying-ground. It was a downright shame and beyond all understanding and August, the lad from the sea, chose one day to let fall a word or two about the way things stood. What if they all were to go down and clear the thin layer of turf from the rocks? They could collect

all the men in the village and do the work in a few days at most; August himself would lend a hand.

No answer. The people turned away from him, muttering to themselves and shuffled along as they had since time began. Who was this August to teach *them* anything?

There was one man who didn't think the idea was a bad one and that was Karolus, the owner of the eight-oar, and husband of Ane Maria. What else had they done in the neighbouring parishes a few years ago but go out on the rocks with a crowd of men and clear the ledges, thereby providing themselves with drying-grounds for all time to come?

'Anyway, it's too late this year,' they all said.

Another shrewd objection was that there was no man in the village who knew anything at all about drying fish and who could supervise the work. What, then, was the use of having a drying-ground? August explained that he knew all about drying fish. 'You?' they said. 'I have been in Newfoundland,' he answered.

'Where *haven't* you been!' they said.

August got nowhere.

And then, one afternoon, a fine Sunday afternoon, the first day of July, when the men lay about waiting for St. Olaf's Day when they would begin their mowing, on that particular afternoon something happened. Suddenly from Karolus' barn music came streaming forth. What—music? Had the two organ-grinders from distant countries come back? Children raced to the scene from all quarters. They saw August and Edevart sitting there in the barn and August had his accordion, silk straps, gaudy colours and all. It was sublime music that poured forth, bass and treble, from a double row of keys, and there was no rest for August's fingers. Now the grown-ups came running; they had just returned from church and were going home to sleep. But they couldn't sleep with such music. Karolus himself came. Soon the barn was full and

everyone stood and stared, fascinated. That August, what was he made of! When he sang a touching song about a girl in Barcelona, everyone was deeply affected.

August stopped and wiped his forehead. 'He can do more than any of us!' said Karolus. 'Where did you learn all that?' they asked him. He made no reply. After a bit, he packed the instrument away in its case and it did them no good to ask him to go on playing.

A number of the men had heard accordion-music before, both at Lofoten and in the towns of Finmark, but no one had anticipated anything so spectacular from August. Here he had been going about amongst them for days without number and had never mentioned a word about it. There must be considerably more to him than was at first apparent. God knows now if they weren't true at that, all the stories he had told them about his past experiences, all the unbelievable yarns which they had heretofore regarded as downright lies. From now on everyone viewed him through different eyes; ay, he would never cease to be a mystery to them. They hadn't yet seen his bunch of keys from India, that they had not; but they had seen the double row of keys on his instrument and it was not to be denied that he had fingers for them both. Where had he learned his art? Perhaps in some occult manner, perhaps even from the Prince of Darkness himself!

Edevart was quietly proud of his comrade and did not stand in his light. He went straight to Karolus and said: 'There he sat now and played just as you all have heard. But I have seen and heard him do even grander things. And now he wants that we should clear off the rocks.'

'Ay,' said Karolus.

'Then will you really help us?'

'Ay.'

'H'm; then what do you say we make it to-morrow?'

They assembled many men, a party which included

even the quarrelsome Teodor. When boat-owner Karolus himself was willing to lift his hand, could the others hold off any longer? And when in a week's time the work was finished, everyone was pleased. They now had a drying-ground for many thousand fish, a drying-ground large enough to handle at one time an entire cargo of the size they might reasonably expect in Polden.

August said to Edevart: 'Now we'll make good money next summer, you and me, and you needn't worry about that!'

When winter came, Edevart shipped to Lofoten in Karolus' crew and August went along as a passenger. August was the one who was to get bids for the new drying-ground and for himself as foreman of the workers. With his gold teeth and his gold ring he was not your common fisherman; no, and as a last gesture of affluence he had borrowed back from Edevart the handsome black dress-coat. Oh, August was no mean delegate! Furthermore, luck was with him. After he had rowed about among the cargo vessels for a week or so and had spoken with their respective skippers, at last he ran across a man who might be termed a find—a peasant skipper from Hardanger who owned not only his ship but the cargo she carried as well, a powerful dark-bearded fellow who wore a hair-chain with a gold locket across the front of his vest. He gave evidence of being somewhat of a social-climber and a gay dog. With this man August entered into negotiations. August himself was cross-questioned and had to give a full account of both himself and his drying-ground, but it ended with a contract and signatures. The Haringer had with him a job-lot of kringles, a barrel of *brændevin* and a whole bin full of nuts in the store-room of his ship and all these were for the folk who would dry his fish for him. The skipper's name was Skaaro and his vessel was the *Seagull.*

August spent the winter aboard and lent the skipper a

hand laying in his fish; occasionally he would relieve the fish-splitter when the latter was needed elsewhere; even at such intricate work August was a finished master. Naturally his pay was nothing to speak of, but he had free board and lodging; and anyway August didn't care to create the impression that he was so hard up that he needed money for everything he did; he wanted to be considered more like a guest on a visit. In the light summer evenings he sat and played cards with Skipper Skaaro and lost and won back nuts; he might also take a little drink to be sociable, but further than this he simply would not go. A steady and thoroughly conscientious young drier of fish, nothing whatever seemed wrong with him. When he told of his experiences in foreign lands he kept his imagination within bounds and Skipper Skaaro, who knew only the dialects of Hardanger, Bergen and Lofoten, was always an interested listener.

Early in April the Lofoten fishing ended and the *Seagull* took on her last fish. Edevart came aboard to pilot the vessel over to Polden; for this he was to receive little or nothing but he was well off since he was to have free rations. On a lovely warm evening with the sun shining and a faint breeze blowing, the *Seagull* sagged into Polden and threw her line ashore. Folk stood on the walls round about and gazed at this marvellous spectacle.

The cleaning of the fish began with a drink and a kringle for one and all—August went around with the bottle and Edevart with the kringles. The cleaning was heavy work and disagreeable and therefore brought good wages—so much for each fisherman's hundred, 120 fish. There were some whose work was to heave the fish up from the hold and into the small boats to be ferried over to the rocks; here men and women stood knee-deep in the sea and washed the fish—their task was to cut away the dark belly-skin and clotted blood and leave a pure white prod-

uct. When the fish were thoroughly clean, inside and out, they were trundled away in two wheelbarrows and spread out over the rocks. August with Edevart at his side, supervised everything from the *Seagull's* deck where they had a bird's-eye view of the work; now and then they called down into the hold, pointed and directed the boats. Karolus with his eight-oar was earning good money now —he could row a whole fisherman's hundred at one time in his large boat. Skipper Skaaro went ashore frequently, wandered about on the ledges or visited with the rinsing women. His jovial manner won him popular favour at once.

Some days later, after the entire cargo had been taken ashore and made ready, the *Seagull* was gone over and swabbed until she shone. The fish now lay in small stacks here and there on the ledges. As soon as the sun had thawed the last patches of snow left on the rocks, the drying proper would begin.

The first thing, every morning, a drink was passed out to each of the men; the women and children received a kringle or a handful of nuts apiece, but never anything to drink. But oh, what if they had! It was such a mild *brændevin* the *Seagull* carried, nothing to turn any one's head. This morning drink was nothing but a token of goodwill, and such was always the custom on all the drying-grounds. Edevart made friends with many a youngster by passing out an extra kringle here or there or a couple of nuts on the sly; they would return to their daily toil with never a complaint about anything. It took all morning to spread out the fish and at noon there was an hour's rest; then the fish were turned and laid back upward for several hours; toward evening they were gathered in again. The ledges swarmed with people all day long.

Everything was running smoothly now; the only interruptions were holidays and an occasional rainy day when the piles of fish remained untouched. Already, while in

Lofoten, Skipper Skaaro had sent home as superfluous the men he had brought up from the south—the fish-splitter and the other men—since there would be nothing for them to do throughout the following summer. Even Skaaro himself began to go off on visits to the other skippers on the near-by drying-grounds and this left August and Edevart alone on board the sloop. None the less they always put in full time and never wasted a moment. While August was busy cooking their food and overseeing the work of the driers, Edevart painted the ship and scraped the mast and bowsprit and gave them a coat of oil. Whenever rain was in the air, they would both hurry ashore and lend a hand gathering in the fish. And each time the Skipper came back home after one of his expeditions, he found no one idle; he became more and more satisfied with his two Nordlanders, and his friendliness was somewhat intensified, no doubt, by the fact that August had given him his gold ring. In the eyes of the Haringer this was a magnificent gift, but August, who was a good-natured and generous sailor, considered it little or nothing. Skipper Skaaro praised his assistant in all the neighbouring villages and, after a fashion, made him famous.

The Skipper came home one afternoon from one of his visits to the neighbouring drying-grounds, feeling cheerful and thoroughly pleased with life. He had made up his mind to give a party for a couple of his friends and there was to be food on board and a dance ashore; August was told to go out and get hold of a musician. August nodded and smiled a bit to himself. He was also to find the largest barn and some girls for the men to dance with. August nodded again. But food, fresh meat, now that it was the closed season for sea-birds and wild game? August pointed to a flock of sheep up near the edge of the woods and said: 'There's enough to choose from here.'

There were no regular shepherds on any of these farms in the north and the flocks often came grazing down as

far as the drying-grounds. The sheep were good and plump at this time of the year and Skipper Skaaro told the young housewife, Ane Maria, that he would like to buy a ram for fresh meat, as he was going to give a party. Ay, she would mention it to Karolus. The following day she came back with Karolus' consent and the Skipper asked her if she would be so kind as to take him out and show him the animal. They went out together, and it was not long before Ane Maria returned home alone, excited and out of breath and took up her work again. The other women and girls made faces at each other and seemed to be amused. 'Didn't you see the sheep?' they asked her. 'What did you do with the Skipper? He was after you right enough, wasn't he?' Ane Maria said nothing. A little later Skipper Skaaro returned from the pasture and made straight for his ship, where he sat down and began bathing one of his eyes with cold water. It was August again who had to act as middleman and buy the ram. This did not prove difficult, however, as both Karolus and Ane Maria behaved just as though nothing had happened and sold him the animal without any discussion: Karolus was even willing to have his barn used for the dance.

It turned out to be a genial affair, with everyone in high spirits; there were drinks and kringles for all and, for those who desired it, wine from the general store. The guests of honour were two young skippers, their dancing partners the young housewives and girls of the village—the musician—none other than August himself, who played his accordion. It was a grand and a rare treat to have August sitting there playing his marvellous music which streamed forth bass and treble, from the double row of keys; it was like music for a wedding; even the three young sea-dogs admitted that they had never heard the like.

So everything was going first-rate? Ay; but Edevart was not getting along too well. No, for of course that

Ragna had to be there; little Ragna who had grown up to be a tall and beautiful girl. Oh, to be sure she was there and the skippers were rivals for her attention. And even Karolus was having a hard time of it, especially when he saw that Ane Maria was dancing and dancing on endlessly with Skipper Skaaro and couldn't keep off the floor during a single dance. What was to be done about it? She was young and healthy; she liked, of course, to be in the swim and much sought after just as she had been before she was married; maybe too, she discovered that this fellow from Hardanger was as strong as a bear when he led her and swung her about. And surely everyone noticed that this same Haringer bowed low and thanked her after every dance, a courtesy she was unaccustomed to and had not experienced once since the day she was a bride!

'Shall we go outside and cool off a mite?' asked Skipper Skaaro.

'No,' she answered. 'I don't think so.'

'I have a little bottle of wine in my pocket,' he said.

'I don't care anything about that,' she answered.

So the Skipper went alone and stood around ouside. And that was the very thing the pearl-belted Olga did immediately after. Her home was really in the next parish, but she had come here to work at the store; she was small and brown-eyed and was like a willow when she danced, but you couldn't call her pretty. What of it? Her nose turned up too much, but again what of it? Skipper Skaaro stood right where he was and talked with her for a while; he gave her a drink of wine from his bottle and he looked at her pearl belt and fondled it and had never seen anything quite so pretty.

And there inside sat Ane Maria watching through the open door and not a thing escaped her. At length she began to dance with her husband, but oh, it wasn't the same! The fellow tramped, he did, and he never once

thought to bow, and she held many other things against him. How cold his hands were, although it was a warm summer night; they were moist and clammy to hold! Naturally this came from the many drinks he had had. His breath was brandy unadulterated and he did nothing about the smell, chewed no coffee-beans as the Hardanger Skipper had done.

Skaaro came in with his lady, with the pearl-belted Olga, and thereafter they danced perpetually—never once left the floor. Between dances they stood still brazenly in the middle of the room and waited for the next dance to begin. Skaaro was wild with excitement; when the dance was in full swing he gleefully called out to the musician for more: 'Make it long,' he called. 'Drag it out, double it up!'

Oh, what a whirl of pleasure!

But now the musician has to stop and gasp for breath. His right thumb has become white and numb inside the heavy silk strap. The two visiting skippers drew out a dollar bill apiece to give to him as a special reward. They said that this was not too much; that they never had heard such playing. They also wanted to know where he had learned his art but August declined to answer their question. During the intermission the skippers lit their pipes and talked with the ladies while Edevart passed the refreshments.

And now, whatever the cause of it could be, a smell of smoke became noticeable. In the semi-gloom inside the barn, the only light there was being that which came in through the half-open door, there was no fire to be seen. Nevertheless the smoke increased. Everyone sniffed and looked about and the skippers put their hands over their pipes to extinguish them.

Then suddenly a flame shot up from the hayloft to the left. 'Water!' went up the cry. 'Water!' The womenfolk screamed. Karolus and his companions ran to the

houses after pails and there was much confusion; Edevart darted like a streak down the road toward the beach to get buckets from the *Seagull*. Skipper Skaaro, who had just been thinking of taking Olga out for a walk when he discovered the fire, turned sharply around and tore off his coat and threw it over the flames. There he tramped on it. It was all so coolly and cleverly done! He had smothered the flames and he had burned his coat in the act, but what did he care about that? A devil of a fellow he was, a regular hero; the sleeves of that lovely violet-striped calico shirt of his shone impressively from the hayloft, and from his belt hung a knife in a bright silver sheath. Ane Maria could not take her eyes away from him and said under her breath: 'Now he's gone and ruined that handsome coat of his!'

When the pails of water arrived, the men had only to drench the hay and the fire was entirely out. But Karolus continued long after to be frightened and uneasy; he had just finished getting in most of his hay and here he would be a ruined man, if bad luck should cause him to lose it. 'I'll pay for the hay that was burned just now,' said Skipper Skaaro so that his audience might hear. Just such a straightforward fellow was he. And Karolus took his hand and thanked him for what he had done; Ane Maria also took his hand and was touched and brushed ashes and hay from his coat. Skaaro said: 'No, you needn't thank me. It was we who lit our pipes and started the fire. The question now is which one of us did it?' He looked around for his two guests, but they had disappeared. They had found an opportunity during the recent commotion to slip away. It also turned out that a couple of the girls were gone. But Olga was still there.

And now comes Edevart running up from the beach with a bucket of sea water in each hand! When he discovered that he had arrived too late he gave a quick glance around at the crowd, set his buckets aside and went out

again. He made his way cautiously along the edge of a barley field toward a patch of woods; some suspicion seemed to be lurking in his mind. He heard voices coming from that direction, voices which mumbled and whispered; and there was also something unnatural about the way that large clump of ferns was swaying back and forth! He ran to the place on tiptoe. Well, well! So one of the missing skippers was busy kissing her, eh? Ay, perhaps he had already kissed her many times! A cold shiver ran up and down Edevart's spine and he began to thump himself crazily on the breast. Ragna was the first to discover him and uttered a little cry; the skipper let her go and permitted her to get up.

It might have turned out seriously at this point had not the skipper recognized Edevart as one of the men from the *Seagull;* as it was, he did not pick a quarrel with him. Naturally he was both upset and disappointed over being disturbed in his play but he smiled with resignation. He took a half-full bottle out of his pocket and spoke to Edevart: 'Come, comrade, you too must take a swig.' Edevart scowled unpleasantly and was on guard against so much friendliness. The skipper passed the bottle to Ragna and she sipped daintily and said: 'Thank you.'

'Is this lad here your sweetheart?' asked the skipper.

'Not that I know of,' she answered.

'Then what does he want with us?'

'I can't say as to that,' she answered.

Edevart heard all this. He was not the kind to step back; oh, no, Edevart stepped forward! Ragna came between them. 'What's come over you?' she said. The skipper at this point made the mistake of acting superior, and said disdainfully: 'Let him stand there and beat his breast!' With this he was on the point of taking Ragna's arm and leading her away—h'm! The first blow to land on him sent him into the ferns head over heels in a heap. Edevart must have helped things along with his feet,

using the quick 'crowfoot' he had learned when he was a lad in school. Ragna let out a scream but stifled it at once; she had suddenly been struck by the skipper's appearance—what a remarkable change had come over it! All during the evening he had danced without once removing his hat and now that he had lost it in falling, it turned out that he was completely bald. His head was naked and shiny! Ragna tried hard not to laugh. The little imp—she didn't know any better! The skipper got up, put his hat on and spit on his hands. The next thing to happen was that Edevart was thrown on his back into the bushes and the skipper in a rage calling him every kind of a dirty name. Things didn't end here. Edevart lost no time in getting to his feet again and now there was hatred in his face; he rushed at the skipper and struck his clenched fists together. The skipper snarled: 'Here, you young snot, take this!' And then it happened again. Ragna screamed in earnest now and went running her way.

'What the devil's this—what's going on here!' folk cried as they came running to the scene. The combatants were now rolling over each other on the ground, first one then the other on top, both visibly tired and both bloody. Folk stepped in and separated them, laughed and took it all good-naturedly; surely these two were only fooling, it was a game, a wrestling match. 'Look at that Edevart! He's never the lad to give in!'

Oh, no, Edevart wouldn't give in! He was only a youth in tatters but he had courage.

It was now well on toward morning; as for the dance, that was over. Even the most enthusiastic of the dancers had left, among these the skippers, including Skaaro, and likewise the pearl-belted Olga, Josefina from Kleiva, Beret. Later they came stealthily back from the woods or from along the roads; half sneaking, they were— Oh, those strangely subdued couples who had gone out with their arms around each other so frantically but who

omitted this gesture of affection now as they came wandering back from the woods!

August had packed away his instrument, but took it out again to play a rousing march after the skippers had said good night and were on their way down to the ship. August and Edevart were to sleep in Karolus' barn tonight in order to make room for the visiting sailors on board. They lay down in the hay, but awakened after a few hours in time to go to work. They had had little or no sleep. Huh, but there were others who had had less, who hadn't slept a wink, in fact! There were those who hadn't had enough peace of mind to sleep. Ane Maria, for one, was in a bad mood. She was suffering unbelievably from jealousy and couldn't get the pearl-belted Olga out of her head. What was that hussy doing at the dance, anyway? Who had asked her to come here from her home village, and whatever could it be that Skipper Skaaro saw in that crazy little brat? She'd now been working at the store for the past two years and hadn't even so much as got married! Ane Maria was consumed with bitter hatred of her rival.

Now Karolus, on the other hand, was well pleased with everything. He had had his hay crop saved for him and had even received a dollar from Skipper Skaaro as rent for his barn; in addition to this he had, so to speak, got his wife back again and had danced with her and had as much fun as though he were just newly-married.

'I found this in the hay,' said he, showing her a smoker's pipe.

'In the hay? How come?' asked Ane Maria.

'When we put the fire out.'

'That pipe belongs to Skaaro,' she said.

'You're right when you say it does,' said he. 'I forgot to give it to him to-day.'

Oh, yes! Karolus was as pleased as punch with everything; he'd even found this pipe, and he wasted no time

in slicing up some tobacco and starting in to smoke it. 'Here we have a meerschaum pipe, and that I do know,' he said professionally, and would have Ane Maria understand that many were the things he knew.

Everything returned to normal: Skaaro's guests departed from Polden, August and Edevart moved back aboard the *Seagull* and the drying of the fish continued. The fish were now pretty well dried out and already a supply of birch bark was on hand to serve as a covering for the stacks in case rain should come on toward the end. Money, too, had come for Skipper Skaaro—all of two thousand dollars to cover the rent for the drying-ground and the wages due the driers. The Skipper went about with bulging pockets—ay, he carried his bank right with him. But no one understood what he was going to do with so much money! It looked as though he were simply trying to show off, nothing else.

August said to Edevart: 'It isn't every place in the world that a man can go around with two thousand dollars in his pocket without getting killed.'

Edevart: 'H'm, what life must be out in the world!'

August: 'I don't know what to say about it. There are times when you can pick up quite a bit of money. Once I got twenty-five dollars just to keep my mouth shut.'

'You don't say so!'

'It was during a free-for-all fight and you can bet your life you never saw a free-for-all without somebody turning into a corpse. After they had killed him, they took his watch and money away from him.'

'And then you got twenty-five dollars?'

'Ay, but not for nothing, for I stood right there and saw the whole thing. But they were regular fellows. They said to me: "You can either get killed like the last one or shut up about this." "I'll shut up," I answered. Then they offered me his watch, the corpse's watch, a great big

gold one. But I didn't dare take it, for then I might get caught myself. "Give me fifty dollars instead," I said. They gave me twenty-five and promised me the rest later. I haven't got it yet, but that's nothing. If I ran across them sometime, they'd pay me all right. They were regular fellows.'

Edevart shook his head thoughtfully and said: 'It's mean to kill folk!'

'That's what you and I think, but it all depends upon the circumstances. Take me, for instance; I never give it a thought, but then I don't have to; I can just go back to India and have more than I need of anything you can think of.'

At last the day came when the fish was ready to be loaded back aboard the sloop—a great day filled with sunshine and activity, with seagulls screaming overhead. Small boats and large again ferried the fish over to the sloop; Karolus was there with his eight-oar and once more earning good money. Skipper Skaaro had put in a successful summer; he was at least two weeks ahead of the skippers from the other drying-grounds and would be able to take a splendid rich cargo to Bergen.

The packers all stood on the *Seagull's* deck and waited for the first fish to come aboard. The packers, and they were always women, carried the fish down into the hold and stacked them in neat piles; these women were always chosen on every drying-ground from among the prettiest and cleverest in the village and were always paid extra high wages. It was in some ways an honour to be chosen for the packing, but word had come from the neighbouring villages that this work was not always free from danger, for it meant food and drink in the cabin and sometimes down there things went from bad to worse.

Ane Maria was not among the packers, but Beret was there and Josefina from Kleiva was there and, in addition

to these, Ragna and another girl who were both to lend a hand trimming the cargo. But Ane Maria was *not* there and hadn't even been asked. The women on the ledges asked her if she weren't supposed to be aboard, that is, if she weren't one of the packers. She answered:

'Do you think I'd go aboard and pack? Don't you think I'm just a little above that sort of thing?'

'Oh, but she felt sorry for herself and she continued to make nasty remarks. Let that Josefina from Kleiva go if she wanted to; she was a young widow and could do with herself whatever she wished. But Beret? Here she had a husband in one of the boats and a two-year-old child at home; what made *her* want to pack?

'The work pays well now,' answered the women.

'Ay, and may all her work pay her as well,' replied Ane Maria sarcastically.

It took several days to load the ship. On the very first day, shortly after tea, Skipper Skaaro went down into the hold and said to Josefina: 'What's the trouble with you? What makes you look so unhappy?'

'It's the smell down here,' she answered.

'Then you must lie down a while till you get over it,' said the Skipper.

She objected a little, but the Skipper dragged her with him into the cabin and made her lie down. Later on, when she had recovered, she refused to return to the hold for fear of the ugly looks she would be getting from Beret and Ragna. She was set ashore without delay and with a straight face she told everyone she met on the ledges that she had been unable to stand the smell down in the hold.

'Who is to pack in your place?' asked Ane Maria.

'He must be thinking he can get along with only Beret and Ragna,' answered Josefina. This reply gave Ane Maria food for thought.

During the night a strong sense of honour and virtue seemed to flare up in the breast of this same Ane Maria;

she went to the sideboard and took out Skaaro's pipe which Karolus had hidden away and took it with her to the fish rocks in the morning. She borrowed Fish-drier August's dory and rowed herself over to the *Seagull.*

Skipper Skaaro recognized his pipe immediately and thanked Ane Maria and gave her a drink. 'I suppose this is some kind of a meerschaum?' said she of the pipe.

'No, it's made from a kind of wood they call briar and comes from abroad,' he answered.

After they had talked a while together, Ane Maria glanced into the hold and asked: 'Are there enough down there?'

'No,' he answered. 'But what's to be done about it? You wouldn't want to go below, would you?'

'I wasn't even asked to.'

Skaaro: 'No, we didn't think it would do any good. But what do you say now, would it have?'

'No!' was Ane Maria's reply.

Skipper Skaaro now tried coaxing her to go down in Josefina's place; he was short-handed, he said, and here was Ragna already talking about taking a rest.

Ane Maria seemed to waver. 'I might, just to help you out,' she said. But she certainly expected that he would coax her further and therefore she repeated her no.

With this, Skipper Skaaro became exasperated, turned on his heel and said: 'You're always so chuck-full of nonsense. . . .'

Oh, here we didn't find a man who would waste his time on her! No, he went his way, went down to his cabin.

Ane Maria climbed into the dory and rowed back to shore.

She was on the verge of tears now and was bitter with resentment. Oh, that Skipper Skaaro would get it all back, just you wait! What if she told Karolus that he had been after her that time in the woods? Then Karolus would give him something to taste, no question about

that! That same time in the woods the Skipper had asked her to gather a bowl-full of the cloudberries which grew there and to bring them to him on board. And she had answered with goodness in her heart that she would. 'Ay,' she had said. 'Just wait till they are a bit riper.' Now let him think she would pick berries for him!

To the ledge-women she said straight out that she was sorry she had given him back his pipe. He'd have had a great time getting it if she hadn't!

'What's he done to you this time?' they asked.

'Done to me? Didn't he ask me to go down in the hold and pack? Didn't he beg me to? But I'm not of a mind to pack for him—I'm not one of that kind!'

In the meantime that young Ragna had come up from the hold one afternoon and announced that she was no longer able to stand the smell down below. 'Just look at that young brat!' Beret surely must have said to herself. 'She considers herself old enough to tempt the Skipper!' It was a fact that this Hardanger sea-captain with enviable ingenuity permitted first one packer and then another to become tired and miserable and kept them in his cabin until they had recovered. Just yesterday one of the girls who had been taken on as a trimmer had gone to him, and now here was Ragna who simply would not be denied! He-he-he! Beret must have smirked as she went over these things to herself.

When the Skipper came by and saw Ragna on deck, he was at once accommodating: 'Ay, if you're tired, you must go below and rest in bed!'

But this time Edevart was within earshot. Edevart was in charge of the tally and of general order and was acting almost in the capacity of mate. He was up in the rigging at this particular moment. As soon as he realized what their conversation dealt with, he let go his hold and hopped to the deck. That was enough of a hint for Ragna; she wasn't going to make any more mistakes where Ede-

vart was concerned! To save herself, she said: 'I won't go below and go to bed. Just let me sit down here for a little while!'

And it was only a very little while, too, that they left her there in peace; Beret was not exactly supercilious this time, but God knows she was unreasonable and jealous enough! Anyway, she screamed up through the hatch: 'Are you going to leave me down here to pack the cargo alone?' Ragna called back to quiet her: 'You needn't be afraid that I'll be going down in the cabin; I'm just going to sit here for a bit.'

Edevart knew little enough of the world, but he was beginning to care a great deal for dear little Ragna and it was possible that Skipper Skaaro was not to be trusted; he might take it into his head to kiss her, to bend her head back and kiss her. And that would not be fair. However, here Ragna had sat alone and said no to him, and after the Skipper had gone, she had tossed her head and pouted: 'He thought he could make me do it!' These words eased Edevart's mind considerably and he said: 'If you don't feel well when you're down below, you mustn't stay there. I'd rather have some one else come aboard.' She answered that she was better now and with this she returned to the hold.

With Sunday the loading came to a halt. Some of the folk from the village went to church, but Ane Maria, she was to tend the flock that day; somebody had to do it and she was not going to shirk when it came her turn. Karolus offered to go in her place, but she said no, he needn't bother. Karolus and his wife hadn't been getting along so well these past few days; this was because of the pipe which Ane Maria had returned. 'What did you do it for?' asked Karolus.

'What did I do it for? Were you wanting to steal the pipe?'

'I could just as well have bought it and paid for it later, on the day we're given our wages.'

'Well, well,' said she. 'It isn't too late even now.'

This was by no means a dull retort and Karolus became even more exasperated. 'Are you sure he'd be giving back the pipe now that he's got it again?' he asked.

'No, I don't know about that,' she answered.

'H'm, so you don't know about that? But here's all I have to say, and that is that you could have let that pipe alone!'

Ane Maria gave in and said: 'Well, I'm sorry about it.'

With that it ended. But Karolus had been dissatisfied and his wife had been out of sorts for several days. To-day she was going to sweeten things up by shepherding the flock in his stead. 'Do you think I'd be letting you go with the sheep!' she said. 'I wouldn't think of it. It isn't right that you should be going out to tend them!'

No doubt Ane Maria had her own reasons for wanting to tend the flock. She was a moth fluttering about the flame. There she was, driving the sheep straight down toward the drying-ground and the *Seagull* and letting herself be seen by those on board! She had put on her best finery, but maybe this was only because it was Sunday and for no other reason at all.

When she had made doubly sure that she had been seen by Skipper Skaaro, who was pacing the deck, she calmly drove her flock on up into the woods toward the bog.

And sure enough, there came Skipper Skaaro!

'Good morning!' he said. 'What's become of those berries you were going to pick for me?'

'Are you in a hurry for them?' she asked cuttingly.

'Ay, time is flying. We'll have the last of the cargo aboard to-morrow, and if I get a breeze I'll be sailing.'

'I'd rather wait till the berries are ripe,' she said.

He took this good-naturedly and hinted that she didn't want to pick berries for him anyway, that she didn't care to do him that favour. 'Perhaps it's better I pick them myself after all,' said he. 'But then, you'll be putting the sheriff on my trail, won't you?'

Now she would show him that she wasn't of a mind to waste further words on him; she drove the sheep away from the bog and went along behind them. That put Skaaro in a devil of an embarrassing position; he couldn't simply go his way with that; instead he had to stop and cry out petulantly: 'Is it true then that I must pick my own berries?'

'Ay,' she answered. 'As many as you like!' She pointed across the bog and said: 'Over there they're ripest!'

He followed her direction, but with each stride, he sank deeper and deeper into the muck. Oh, with what devilish wickedness in her heart she had pointed, without once warning him of the place where the bog was bottomless! She knew that if he were to walk far enough ahead without turning from his course to come back, he would sink in so deep that he couldn't lift his legs any more—simply sink, sink. She knew every square inch of the bog by heart; everyone knew it. In one spot there was a little green tussock floating on top of the sludge and if you were to step on this tussock in order to steady yourself, it would roll over and make you lose your balance. Ane Maria had once seen an ox go to the bottom there; a strange ox which had not grown up in this parish and become familiar with its dangers. She had also heard the story, or the legend, of a young girl who, broken-hearted over a love affair, had come here once upon a time to end her life. The girl had imagined that by taking her life in this manner she would be able to die a slow death and pray all the while to God for forgiveness. When she had sunk up to her neck and her arms had already gone under, she was seized with terror, and folk heard an

eerie cry from the bog, oh, one shriek after another. But it was night by now, and when the men had at last found their way to her, it was too late, God have mercy on her soul! They dug down into the muck and got a good grip on her hair—they pulled her hair out by the roots. They dug deeper and tied ropes about her neck and tugged; there were many men there to tug, but it was dark night and they couldn't see—they pulled her head right off from her body. Then they gave the whole thing up and said the Lord's Prayer. It may have been merely a legend or it may have been true.

Skipper Skaaro jumped over on to the tussock; it spun around like a ball and he sank in beside it and stayed there. At first he didn't pay much attention to his condition, didn't even bother to notice that he might be ruining his shoes, even though, to be sure, they had just been polished bright for Sunday. He looked up and laughed a bit; it didn't occur to him to worry. 'Fine streets you have here,' he said. 'Wonderful pavements, he-he-he!'

Ane Maria had nothing to say.

The Skipper began to struggle in earnest to get his feet out; he was becoming impatient and stamped. This was a useless thing to do; he simply sank deeper and deeper. 'What kind of a Hell-hole is this?' he shouted.

Ane Maria calmly answered: 'You ought to have gone around.'

The Skipper was no longer laughing now; he was struggling to get out and was up to his knees in muck. He was seized with rage. First he leaned over to one side and tried to lift himself, and then he leaned over to the other side and tried to lift himself, but all this only made things worse for him—he sank down deeper and deeper and discovered that, as a result of this struggling, he had lost one of his shoes.

Oh, it was amusing, amusing indeed! To Ane Marie this was satisfying, deeply satisfying. He ground his

teeth, swung his arms around in desperation and howled like a dog. Suddenly he held his breath and said as though to himself: 'Am I going to stay here?' Perhaps it was beginning to dawn upon him that the woman over there on firm soil was going to let him go to the bottom. 'Why are you standing there without helping me?' he screamed at her.

'You didn't ask me to help you,' she answered stubbornly.

He thought things over. H'm, he should ask her! Let's see: if he were to let out a cry for help, it wouldn't be heard on board; the wind was coming from the direction in which the sloop lay. On the other hand, a good loud call ought to be heard in the village over there. It was beginning to be a matter of life or death; the bog was sucking him down. He let out his first yell.

He didn't yell at the top of his lungs, only loudly enough to throw fear into Ane Maria. 'What do you think folk will say about you when they come?' he asked.

'There isn't anybody home; they're all at church,' she answered.

He turned on her furiously and shook his fists at her. 'If you're going to stand there and watch me go under in cold blood, then you're worse than any monster!' he roared.

Ane Maria answered: 'You ought to pray to God.'

'Help!' screamed Skaaro at the top of his voice and he heard with satisfaction that the mountain-peaks echoed his mighty bellow. He yelled at the woman: 'When I get out of here, I'll reckon up with you, you devil!'

'It would be better if you prayed to God,' she repeated.

'I'll tie you to the mast and beat you to a pulp!'

'Well, well; so that's what you intend to do?'

'And after that I'll hand you to the authorities.'

She sat down in the heather, smoothed out her skirt and assumed an expression of indifference.

'You're just waiting for me to die!' he cried. 'But you can wait till you're blue in the face for that! I still have my arms out! He-elp!'

The echo answered again but there was no living creature save Ane Maria to hear him.

The Skipper had been unable to keep from moving and thus only hastened his sinking; the mud was now almost up to his chest. He tried to lie down flat on his belly in order to keep himself from drilling down deeper into his grave with the squirming of his body, but he was now over his waist and could no longer bend forward. 'He-elp!'

Ane Maria got up, brushed twigs and dry heather from her skirt and looked about. Everything was still.

'What have I done to you, you creature!' he asked, snorting. 'What I wanted of you here in the field this summer is nothing to take my life for. It was enough that you gave me a black eye. Since then I haven't mentioned a word about it. I danced with you in the barn and you didn't even once go outside with me to get cool. Did I try to carry you out by force? What have you got to kill me for? Go your own way and let me go mine; I'm not so dangerously in love with you after all. It was you who brought my pipe out to me, and why in the devil you did it I'll never be able to understand!' He held his breath, looked wildly at her and waited. 'No, you don't answer; you are too stupid! I'll tell you what you are, you're a low-down filthy woman without brains enough to know what you're doing; you are made of wood and you've got a wooden head. That's just what you have! Now maybe you will open your mouth!'

Ane Maria began to wander slowly along behind her flock.

'Ay, and now you're going away, and I'll be remembering you when I stand before God's Judgment seat!' he said menacingly.

'I'm going to look for help,' she answered as she drew away.

'No, now you're telling a lie!' he cried after her. 'You are just going farther away from folk; you want to murder me, that's what you want to do!'

He became quieter after he was left alone. He clawed down into the mud again and got hold of his watch, wiped it carefully off and moved it into a pocket higher up. He then thought he would have to do something about saving his pocket-book which held the two thousand dollars in addition to some very valuable papers. It was a fat pocket-book; he would hold it aloft with the hand which would be the last to go under and maybe, at the very end, throw it up on firm soil. Surely some one would find it; he owed for the use of the fish-rocks and for the labour of all the workers.

Strange how things go! This morning he had jumped out of his bunk, light-hearted and singing; now he was a man doomed to die but a few steps from safety. Naturally if he had spoken nicely to Ane Maria instead of raising his voice, he might have offered her a big lump of money to throw him a stick or two of wood with which to keep himself afloat. Exactly; that he might. But this thought had never once entered his mind, not for a single moment, and even now he didn't regret it. No, he had been so beside himself with anger, so steaming with defiance toward this creature that he had ruined his chance to escape.

Hours passed. He sent out his calls for help, but no one answered. All was still. The bells of the flock had been silent for some time now, so far away the sheep had wandered; even the wind grew fainter and fainter as the sun sank into the afternoon. First it was two o'clock, then three—he looked at his watch, wound it and thereafter didn't let it leave his hand. The mud had now mounted halfway over his chest. Oh, his courage was failing him

now! Occasionally he whimpered as the realization swept over him that his end had come. His arms were still free, but he could no longer budge his legs—it was as though they were encased in lead from his feet to his thighs. No matter if the people had all gone to church, as Ane Maria had said, they ought surely to have returned by this time. It was a long way to the hill where the church stood and the people would be giving themselves plenty of time to loiter about, exchanging news; but it was late now, terribly late. Was rescue out of the question? He screamed and bellowed his calls for help, listened for a time, then screamed and bellowed again; he sobbed and slapped the mud with the palms of his hands. And now his screams became fainter and fainter! he had lost the last of his nerve.

All this came to light a long time afterward when Ane Maria made her report. She had not gone on with her flock; no, she had seen everything and even heard what he said when he had talked aloud to himself. Certain phases of his conduct she had been unable to understand. For example, he had suddenly snatched out a piece of paper from his pocket-book and had begun to write something down. She thought to herself: Now he is writing that I am the one who has murdered him! And then a great change came over him; he fell silent, sobbing so that his whole body shook. With that he tore the piece of paper into shreds and buried them deep in the mud at his side. He seemed to be crushed and humble. The bog was little by little sucking down his arms; there wasn't much of him left above the surface.

Suddenly Ane Maria felt a stab in her heart; she leapt to her feet and fled, running in the direction of the houses and screaming.

The last thing Skaaro had thought to do was to heave his watch and pocket-book over onto dry ground. He had written nothing. Since he had no family and was without near kinsfolk he had left no word of farewell.

CHAPTER FOUR

OH, Norway isn't little, Norway is very large.

When Skipper Skaaro of the *Seagull* was lost in a bog up north, the only notice that the tragedy received in the south was a brief mention in the newspapers, and perhaps a little shudder or two up and down the spine of the casual reader.

The village, on the other hand, is little, the village is narrow indeed. When a man goes down in a bog, the village remembers it long after and talks about it and people steer clear of the bog and the hearts of old and young are filled with terror.

To be sure, Ane Maria had gone to call the church folk, she hadn't failed to do that; she had gone running off to the houses, taking the shortest road—calling as she ran. But it was too late; when they arrived at the spot, there was nothing to be seen in the endless mud of the bog save the little green tussock floating on its side. Folk couldn't believe it, couldn't believe that Skipper Skaaro had been foolish enough to fall in and go down; but after all, it could not be denied. Later on, it came out that each one of them had heard cries but had not taken them seriously. Oh, yes, the Skipper was a victim of the bog all right; his watch and his pocket-book were found.

August and Edevart, who were aboard the *Seagull*, were notified; August took charge of the pocket-book, counted the bills in the presence of witnesses and was the very man to handle the situation. Ane Maria was clear and consistent in her remarks, first to the neighbours and later to the sheriff: she was deeply grieved that she had been unable to come for help in time; she said that she

was unable to understand or explain what the man had been thinking of—it must be that he had delayed and delayed calling for help until the mud was up to his neck, and that during the hour or two she was doing her best to alarm folks and bring them to the rescue, the Skipper had gone completely under.

A dark and terrifying tragedy.

August set out for the neighbouring parish at once to consult Skaaro's two friends who were there and to ask them what they thought should be done with the vessel and the fish. Meanwhile, Edevart continued to supervise the loading of the cargo. He had no difficulty in getting packers now; affected by the fate which had befallen the Skipper, everyone was kind, and willing to help—even Ane Maria sent word that she, too, would pack if she were needed.

The ledge-women mumbled among themselves and shuddered. 'Ugh! I don't even dare look over toward the bog any more; it's terrible to think of what he must have gone through!'

'Don't talk about it, don't even mention it! I couldn't sleep last night, for I thought I heard cries again!'

'What's that? You heard cries?'

'Ay, so it must be that he can't find any peace for his soul.'

Ane Maria asked: 'Why shouldn't he find peace for his soul? What do you mean by that?'

'What do we mean! He is dead and buried in the bog! No one helped him; not so much as the Lord's Prayer was said over him, not a single prayer—so that must be what he's calling for.'

Ane Maria: 'That's only nonsense you're talking! He's not calling. It's only that you're scared.'

'Well, aren't you scared?'

'No, I'd just as soon go and lie on the bank of the bog to-night.'

The women doubted this and one said a bit testily: 'Well, well,—you always were a lot braver than we!'

When the last fish had been stowed away in the hold, Edevart went around on the ledges for the last time with drinks and kringles. It was somewhat of a celebration; but there was no joy and no fun-making—folks talked in low tones and said little. It was unpleasant to be remembering the poor devil who had gone down in the bog, a splendid fellow he was, a remarkable man in every way. But that only goes to show what an uncertain thing life is.

August returned from his conference. Once again he was equal to the occasion, quick to think and quick to speak his mind, quite a different August from that one of the past. He had always been a subordinate, a person to take orders, but now he assumed full command and established the following morning as the time to pay off all the workers. 'We'll begin at the usual time,' he ordered. 'If we get a good breeze we'll be sailing.'

'Who'll sail her?' asked some one.

'Who do you think?' he curtly returned.

His calculations were beyond reproach and no one had any objections; not one of those driers of fish who had themselves kept an accurate account of their working days by cutting notches in their roof-beams at home could catch him in a mistake. He had them come down in the cabin two by two, so that each one would bear witness to his payment of the other—a trick which August had learned during his life at sea.

It amazed Karolus and it even surprised Edevart to see August reckon up and enter each amount in a special kind of daybook; it was as though he were keeping a private record of each man's working time or whatever else it might be. This daybook he returned to his pocket after each settlement had been made.

When the last man had been paid off, August announced that he himself would command the *Seagull* on

her voyage to Bergen. There was no one else here who could sail with compass, chart and clock, and the skippers on the other drying-grounds were unable to leave their own ships.

It was no wonder that folk stared open-mouthed upon hearing such a piece of news, although, to be sure, it did not come wholly as a surprise. August had startled them before; they knew that he was clever at many things, but here he was setting himself up as a grand fellow indeed. Skipper, ay, captain of a large fish-sloop with a full cargo, sailing by compass, chart and clock down the entire length of Norway—he must have something in that head of his after all.

He had Edevart to help him, but even so, he lacked one man for the voyage. He mentioned Teodor's name.

'Teodor, he has a rupture and can't move without a truss,' objected Edevart.

'He's the one I was thinking of,' insisted August.

Edevart reminded August that Teodor had been one of the worst ones in making fun of him and hurting his feelings; he was a bad egg.

'He's going to get paid back for all that now,' said August.

There was no wind and they had to tow the *Seagull* out of Polden. It was hard work and they hired Karolus and another man to row them clear. Out in the fjord they picked up a faint breeze and set sail.

And now once again folk stood around on the piers and gazed. They had said farewell to the sloop and felt empty and alone with themselves; the bay was deserted now, and out on the ledges not a soul was stirring.

Before they were even out of Vestfjorden August reckoned up with Edevart and handed him a good round sum for his summer's work. 'You have been a good man and I want to do well by you,' said he.

Edevart thanked him but didn't understand how he

could have so much coming to him for the time he had put in. August took out his daybook, looked up the place and said: 'That's what the book has to report.'

Edevart: 'What kind of a book is that?'

August: 'This much I'll tell you: it's the book which says how much you and me have coming to us.'

He began to explain himself: 'Do you remember what I told you last spring about our making good money this summer?'

Edevart said he remembered.

August: 'I went to Lofoten, I got Skipper Skaaro and the *Seagull* to come to Polden, I dried the fish—you have never heard of my equal or of any man who could do what I have done.'

Edevart thought this over and said: 'Napoleon, maybe.'

'Ay,' admitted August. 'I don't deny that Napoleon was a great man, too. But you can take me, for example, and ask me anything you want about this world of ours and I can tell you all about it. I kept the whole calendar in my head this summer and I never lost a day.'

And in this August was entirely correct; he had carefully reckoned out all the days. All that Edevart could get from his comrade's lengthy explanation was this: the workers had not each put in the same number of days. In addition to this, on certain rainy days the drying had come to a halt all down the line. Well, well. But August had shrewdly multiplied these various days until their number was very large and had entered them to his own credit in addition to his regular wages. It was this kind of reckoning his little daybook contained. Each worker received exactly what was coming to him, but for every idle day August saw that he himself was paid. And he could keep the whole thing free from suspicion for the simple reason that he had pressed the work forward with unusual energy and was ready to sail a couple of weeks ahead of the other vessels. The result of all this was a

fat sum as extra pay for August and he generously gave a fair share of this to Edevart in order that the two of them might stand together in regard to the whole affair.

Edevart's mind was confused, but none the less he was deeply impressed. After a while he asked: 'But suppose Skipper Skaaro had stayed alive and been there at the reckoning, how would you have arranged to come away with so much money then?'

August answered: 'Then I would have put two or three more names down on the list of workers and taken their money and said I would give it to them personally later on. That would have been the simplest trick I could use.'

Very shrewd and bold, that August; a devil of a fellow in many ways.

Edevart took the money but the transaction troubled him for some days. The affair was unusual and he felt worried about it; surely it was impossible to consider it entirely free from sin, and it was a question whether any good would come of it. Who knows but that Skipper Skaaro might not some time return to earth as a ghost!

One day Edevart said: 'The Skipper is standing there in the bog and knows what we have done, doesn't he?'

'When it comes to that, I gave him my gold ring, didn't I?' answered August.

Edevart, astonished: 'What?'

'I gave it to him for nothing. And why should I do that for nothing?'

Edevart: 'I never gave him anything.'

August was ready with an answer. 'Why should you? Didn't I wear out your coat, your brand-new dress-coat? And you didn't give it to me just for fun, did you?'

In the long run August mixed one thing pretty well with another, sense with nonsense, truth with imagination. And he was never ashamed of himself—he even talked about righteousness, said that honesty was the best policy. August laughed with his golden mouth and reported

that Karolus had asked him for Skipper Skaaro's pipe. 'He doesn't need it any longer now,' Karolus had said. 'No,' August had answered. 'But the late Skaaro has done enough for you, he saved your hay!' Then Karolus had asked for a coat or some other article of clothing, say a hat, just some little thing to remember the Skipper by. 'Who ever heard of such a thing!' August had answered. 'I'll have nothing to do with such low-down greedy business, and you needn't think I will!'

'And don't you think that was the right answer to give him?' he asked Edevart.

Edevart, more confused than ever before and speechless at such inconsistency, gave up and gave in. August certainly must know what he was talking about; he knew a great deal; there was more to him than any one thought.

They had taken on provisions at Bodø and now had enough of everything. The nights were still light as they sailed down the coast of Helgeland, dividing the day into three equal shifts at the wheel. Skipper August hurriedly studied the chart each time they sailed close to land—there was something for that Teodor to watch! Sometimes August would march over to the compass, halt while he took out Skaaro's watch to reckon up the minutes and seconds, then nod and go his way.

Teodor was considered less than nothing on board; Skipper August could by no means be bothered paying attention to such a nonentity if ever it tried to express itself. Off Folla they ran into a storm and a high sea and Teodor learned what it was like to be ordered around. He had no knowledge of sailing; he didn't know the name of a single one of the various ropes and halyards and at first he did so many things wrong that the Skipper threatened to set him ashore and take on 'a grown-up man' in his place. Here off Folla they had to take in both topsail and mainsail and run with the foresail alone. Skipper August stood at the wheel shouting his orders, telling both his men

exactly what to do each moment. August was anything but a coward now; his watery blue eyes had become strong, for this time he had a deck to stamp on. It was one thing to bump his nose on the bottom of an open eight-oar boat and quite another to stand with both legs on a solid deck. No, you couldn't mention both in the same breath.

Passing Folla, their course ran in the lee of some islands and there they found calm water again. The excitement abated and August took out his accordion and played for the first time since the voyage had begun. He was in high spirits; so far they had made a quick passage without any kind of mishap, were past the Rodø lighthouse, and were nearing the Strait of Trondhjem.

'Now do you believe that I can sail?' he asked of Edevart. 'What would you think if we kept right on with the *Seagull* until we came to some foreign country?'

'What do you mean?'

August looked around uncertainly, just as though he were ashamed of something; then he said in a low voice: 'Here I'm carrying Skaaro's watch and I hate to give it up. Here's also over a thousand dollars belonging to Skaaro and it won't be an easy matter just to hand all that over at one shot. Or what do you think? I don't know.'

Edevart, almost without interest: 'Why should you bother your head about it?'

August continued: 'And then there's the ship and cargo, worth a whole lot, a whole fortune. We are the ones who have done the work, when it comes to that, and none of it will do Skaaro any good. If justice means anything, we are the ones who ought to inherit it all from him.'

'Ay, what a lot you think up in that head of yours!' laughed Edevart.

'I just wanted to tell you about it,' said August.

Nothing more was said just then, but later in the day August returned to the subject and said: 'I didn't mean

Teodor was to be with us on that voyage. I'm not that stupid.'

'What voyage?'

'To Spain. We'd have to get rid of that Teodor. And it must be so that you and I are both agreed. Everything you couldn't understand you would have to let me understand for both of us. I've been through it once before.'

'I don't understand a single thing you're talking about,' said Edevart.

It had indeed gone over Edevart's head. In fact, he did not dare to understand his comrade too well. August had sailed around the world and had learned too much; there seemed to be something about his past that was mysterious and obscure.

At Fosenland they came into a green cove and rowed ashore for water; they had heard the sound of a waterfall from up in the woods. On the shore of the bay there stood a lonesome farmhouse from which two children came running to gaze at the visiting sloop. Shortly afterward, a young farmer's wife came down to them; she was barefoot and very scantily clad—skirt and blouse were all she had on. The reason for her coming—and they must not take it amiss—was to ask these kind folk to lend her a hand. A sheep had been caught fast up in the rocks behind the house; it had been there now for two full days and it was impossible for her, alone as she was, to get it loose. The woman had tears in her eyes—it was such a nice sheep, such a pretty sheep.

August: 'Are there no men-folk hereabout?'

'Ay,' said the woman. 'But they are off working on the island now.'

'The island shows on the chart,' said August nautically. 'What kind of work are they doing there?'

'Farm work, one thing or another.'

August had of course asked these needless questions only to impress her with his own importance. Now he

stared up at the house and muttered something to himself. Then, showing himself to be in a gracious mood he promised to come.

They rowed out to their ship taking the water cask, picked up block and tackle and returned to the dory. August also brought along his shot-gun and sat with it across his knees; but he did this chiefly to impress the young woman further.

They walked up to the farm and studied the situation. The sheep had ventured out on a shelf of rock where some green grass grew, but the shelf was too narrow to allow the animal to turn around and come back. Beneath lay deepness and death.

August asked the woman: 'Will you sell the sheep?'

'No, oh, no!—sell it?'

'For then I would buy it and shoot it from here so that it would tumble off.'

'Shoot it? Oh, no! It is such a nice sheep, such a big pretty ewe, and a thoroughbred.'

August led the party up to the top of the cliff, and lowered Edevart by a rope over the side to the ledge below. The sheep stood still as he approached; it was apparently accustomed to the presence of human beings and showed no sign of fear. Edevart hung on the rope and with a firm grip turned the sheep around—he lifted the forepart of the animal up by the wool, and standing it on its hind legs for an instant, turned it so that when it fell back on all fours, it was headed in the right direction. The ewe seemed dazed and unable to understand what had happened—it's head now hung where its back-side belonged! Edevart patted it and spoke gently, but he saw he would have to push it and drive it back the same way it had come.

Edevart then pulled himself up a couple of feet on the rope and swung himself in against the cliff, hung there a moment, let go the end of the rope and dropped. 'Pull

up!' he called up to the others. He heard the creaking of the pulley up on the top of the cliff and he watched the rope glide up the side. Then he crept on cautious feet along the ledge behind the sheep, urging it onward.

Down by the house the woman and her two children stood and looked on; the woman wept and was sick with fright both for the ewe and for the man in peril. Now and then the children let out a cry. 'Not so loud!' warned their mother. 'You might make them fall!' But she herself screamed with joy when the whole thing was over; when the boys came down she took them each by the hand and thanked them. She told the children to do the same and they both stretched out their little hands, right or left, it didn't matter which. Their mother looked at Edevart with strange eyes and thanked him in particular, and there was warm colour in her cheeks.

Oh, well, the young woman saw of course that he was the handsomest one. And Edevart for his part was not one whit better off than she—he, too, turned red as fire. Oh, for youth, blessed innocent youth!

They were invited into the house and were given milk to drink and again the woman singled out Edevart and gave him his milk first. With this Skipper August's mood seemed to sour; he took Skaaro's watch from his pocket and said: 'Ay, lads, we'll have to be getting back to the ship. I want to get on with the cargo!'

The woman, to show her gratitude, wanted to make coffee for them. August replied: 'No, we have coffee on board, we are stocked up for the whole voyage. Thanks, anyway. Is that a picture of your sweetheart over there on the wall?' he asked jokingly.

'That's my husband,' she answered.

'Is he off on the island working, too, perhaps?'

'No. He is away.'

'A handsome man,' said August at this. 'Is he off at sea?'

'He went to America.'

'Well, well, so he's in America! I'm well acquainted over there. How long has your man been gone?'

'Four years.'

'So; is he coming back pretty soon?'

'The Lord knows,' answered the woman.

'And you, too, I'm pretty sure. He writes to you, doesn't he?'

'No, he doesn't write. He has never written.'

August slapped his knee with his hand: 'Hasn't he ever written? Then how do you know he ever got to America?'

'Ay, for I know that he went ashore at New York.'

'And then you lost track of him?'

The woman made no reply.

Edevart's heart was bleeding with sympathy; he was confronted by something he could not understand,—Fate, a new kind of suffering. This woman could not be more than twenty-five or -six years old; there was something humble in the way she drooped her head, and her eyes were affectionate,—no, not exactly affectionate, but tender. Where was her husband keeping himself; was he still alive? How was the woman supporting herself? A hand-loom stood in the corner, yarn of various colours hung on the wall and over the backs of chairs. Everything in the house was unpainted. Edevart sat still and now and then wet his lips; he was far from indifferent. Something was stirring within him; humility? Love perhaps? At least it was something sweet.

There was now nothing left for August to inquire about, so he got up and went to the door. Edevart was the last to leave the house. The woman followed on his heels and at the door said: 'Thanks to you for all you have done! What is your name?'

Edevart, taken aback: 'Who, me? Oh— Edevart's my name. And yours?'

'Lovisa Margreta Doppen.'

'My name is Edevart Andreassen,' said he. 'And may you have a happy life!'

Oh, for youth! They did not take each other by the hand; they both stared at the floor and whispered like thieves.

'Did you kiss her?' asked August later on.

Edevart was speechless for a moment; he would have to appear more manly than he really was and laugh at this painful question. 'No, she wouldn't let me,' he answered.

'Wouldn't she? It ought to have been me!' said August.

To Edevart it seemed as though a beautiful painting or a rainbow had been shattered in his heart.

However, he immediately found other things to think of; the sloop had drifted well in toward the shore and it was again necessary to tow her out of the shelter. Together with Teodor he bent his back and rowed, his face turned toward the houses; all the while he could see the young woman sitting outside the cottage. Not once did she raise her hand to wave—perhaps because there were two of them in the boat.

And then they set sail.

'That sheep took a devil of a lot of our time!' grumbled Skipper August. 'Now we won't be able to go in to Trondhjem.'

'No, but why should we go there anyway?'

'Because. But we'll stop in at Kristianssund. It lies directly on our course.'

Edevart asked: 'Where do you think that man of hers is keeping himself?'

'Him? Well, I guess he ran away or got killed, that's all.'

'Can you understand why she should be having such bad luck?'

'Well now, how can people like us ever figure it out? She was a pretty woman anyhow and I'm darn glad I took my

crew with me and saved her sheep. But you needn't think I haven't seen prettier women-folk in my day, both on land and sea.'

Edevart, huffed: 'Anyway she was a lot prettier than Mattea.'

'What? Oh, her!' August laughed and wagged his head. 'Ay, she was a little imp of satan! I wonder where she is now? If I had her here in my hands right now, you bet she'd get to know it! But happy journey to her; I didn't want her, anyway.'

They stopped at Kristianssund. August went up into the town and bought himself some wonderful clothes and a new gold ring. He took with him Skaaro's bulging pocket-book and took pains to open it good and wide whenever he paid for anything. Edevart wrote home that now he had seen more new things than ever before in his life, the open sea and endless stretches of country, and besides these, many people, cities and ships. Hasty greetings to all!

Here in the streets of Kristianssund they once again ran across Papst, the old Jew watch-pedlar. He was the same queer creature as before, friendly and fat, with his venerable beard and his many watch-chains stretched across his front. The regular watch-dealers here in the city may have been unkindly disposed toward him, but no one else was his enemy; he was a well-known figure and had sold watches to high and low; everyone stopped to talk with him, youngsters, merchants and consuls.

'A watch to-day?' asked Papst.

'I've got a watch,' answered Skipper August.

Papst was allowed to look at Skaaro's watch. He opened it and exclaimed: 'A fine timepiece!'

'Look in the back, it's got twenty-two rubies,' boasted August. 'Maybe it's you yourself that sold it in the beginning.'

Papst: 'I don't remember. Maybe.' He turned to Edevart and asked him his name and home village and then recognized him. 'It was at the Stokmarknes fair last year,' he said. 'I used to see you often. But you've changed a great deal, you have grown up to be a big lad. Haven't you bought a watch yet?'

'I wanted to wait till I got to Bergen.'

'You mustn't do that, they'll cheat you,' said Papst.

Skipper August asked: 'What will you take for an extra good watch for my mate?'

Papst went down into one pocket, went down into another and fished out two watches: 'An extra good watch, Skipper? Is that what you say? Now here is an extra good watch and here is an extra good watch. Be so kind as to look at them.'

August opened them one after the other and let it be known that he understood all about watches. 'This is the best, in my opinion,' said he.

Papst nodded.

'I could see that at once,' said August. 'What can you sell this watch for?—your best price?'

'Eight dollars, cash.'

'Eight dollars! Are you joking with me? Eight dollars may be all right for a skipper, but where will a mate get eight dollars from?'

'No, maybe you're right about that,' admitted Papst.

Edevart, crestfallen, asked: 'And the other watch is that also a good watch?'

'Yes, very good.'

'How much is that one?'

'That one sells for twice the amount, for sixteen dollars.'

The two comrades' mouths fell open. August said in amazement: 'Twice as much for the simplest watch, how come?'

Papst handed him the watch and said: 'Just look at this watch once again, Skipper, and tell me what you think.'

August took the watch, opened it and looked at it, but now he had become suspicious. 'There's no doubt about it, it's a good watch, as any child could see. But that it should cost twice as much as the other—'

Papst at this point came out with a strange remark: 'That's because of the engraving on the case,' said he. 'This is much more expensive engraving, for it will never wear off.'

'The engraving?'

'Yes. And besides, there are three more wheels in this watch than there are in the other, if the Skipper will be good enough to count them.'

August stood his ground. He gave up counting and remarked in an offended tone of voice: 'I'll tell you, Edevart, when we get to Bergen I'll get you an extra-fine watch at a much better price. Don't worry about that!'

Papst asked: 'When are you sailing, Skipper?'

'Soon, with the night breeze.'

They parted and each went his way. August inquired the way to the most elegant hotel in the city and went there. 'I would take you with me,' he said to Edevart. 'Only you didn't buy yourself any new clothes.'

Edevart answered: 'I'll go back to the ship and relieve Teodor.'

Edevart was no longer himself, far from it—he had money in his pocket, but life had lost its flavour for him. During the past few days he had been suffering the tortures of love; he had no appetite, his face was grey and drawn and he was absolutely down in the mouth. He might write to her, but he had failed to take her address; besides, he was no scribe—she could probably write much better than he and would laugh at him. Oh, that experience in Fosenland! Little Ragna back home no longer existed for him; he might even be told that she was now the sweetheart of some one else without being greatly concerned. He was overwhelmed by something new and powerful—

it felt to him like an attack of some strange illness. But what was there to be done about it? As for hoping, it was out of the question; the future was closed in his face, for he never would go back to that little green cove for water—Lovisa Margreta Doppen would live and die in her hut off there and he himself would live and die far away from her. All they could do would be to remember each other. And he might have slipped a bit of money into her hand. . .

And well it was that at this moment old Papst came shuffling down the dock and casually stepped aboard the *Seagull*. He was so gentle and quiet that Edevart was glad to see him.

'Well, and here I run across my old friend, am I right?' said Papst, surprised. 'Is this where you live?'

Naturally Papst had come to sell him a watch, it was impossible to think anything else, and Edevart braced up and entered into the deal. Papst was there to help him; he learned how much money Edevart had with him all told and then Papst said he thought four dollars would be enough to buy him a good watch. 'Look here, you shall have the very one I picked out for you a while ago!'

'The one that cost eight dollars?'

'Yes. I will sell you a good watch. You have always spoken nicely to old Papst and you shall have it for four. Oh, no, I'm not making anything, I'm even losing a little, but I'll do it for friendship's sake—the watch is easily worth six dollars, and that you can believe. You must wind it well every night and keep from breaking it—it has a very fine movement. I don't want you to get a poor deal from me, for we'll likely meet again.'

Edevart bought the watch. He must surely have touched the old watch-pedlar by his innocence; Papst really wished to please the lad and in the end he gave Edevart a beautiful chain for the watch, for which Edevart took

his hand and thanked him so enthusiastically that Papst howled for his fingers.

They said farewell to each other. 'But don't grip so hard,' said Papst. 'You are too strong!' This he said just to gratify the young man. And now, God knows, perhaps something marvellous had happened: that wandering Jew who certainly had fleeced thousands during his career had possibly in this one instance been more than honest and actually sold at a loss.

August came aboard and threw down a roll of navigation-charts he had bought; he was smoking a cigar and was in a boastful frame of mind. He was none the less entirely sober, merely a bit set up over the fact that he had eaten at that elegant hotel and had had veal roast with imported macaroni. 'I met another captain in the hotel,' said he. 'And we had a long talk at the table. What's this—have you bought you a watch? Let's see!'

When August came to hear about the purchase of the watch he immediately became suspicious and said: 'You'll see, that old rascal has simply taken you in. You should have offered him two dollars; that's what I'd have done. You aren't sharp enough when it somes to worldly affairs. I'll bet that watch of yours isn't even set!'

Edevart: 'I don't know about that. He didn't mention anything about that.'

August: 'Ho-ho, naturally he didn't say anything. Oh, well, you'll see yourself. I say no more!'

That evening they sailed.

Their next stop was Aalesund. August wished to show himself with his fine clothes and his gold ring in this town as well. They stayed there only a few hours before they sailed again, but here too August purchased a couple of charts, this time charts dealing with the coast of France.

Now, good weather seemed all behind them; they ran into rain and a head wind and had to tack. There was no

sea to speak of, but the breeze had stiffened considerably. At Stadthavet they found it hard sailing outside the skerries and August swore violently and was a devil for giving orders, wearing himself out as well as his crew with his domineering ways. Both Edevart and Teodor asked if it wouldn't be best to turn back. 'Turn back?' roared August. 'What is this compared to what I'm used to!' All three remained constantly on watch and had no sleep. Not until their course again brought them into fjords and narrow sounds with land on both sides of them, could Edevart and Teodor lie down for a time in turn. August himself was tireless and stayed on watch the whole time.

When they at length reached Florø, they hove to. It was a shame and the irony of fate that they had to buck that stubborn head-wind just at this time when the end of their voyage lay so near.

A lively little place, Florø, attractive and inviting; but August was restless. The thing he feared most of all was that the other vessels from the north would overtake him. 'We wasted too much time on that sheep,' said he. On the third day August went ashore and was drunk when he returned to the ship that evening; he had become better satisfied with things as they stood, having reckoned out that the other vessels were at least two weeks behind the *Seagull.*

In the morning he went ashore again. After a while he sent a messenger to Edevart with orders to come at once and bring him his accordion.

Yes, yes, of course; August had landed in just the right sort of a place, a lodging-house with a hostess and a housekeeper, girls and drinks and all that sort of thing; and here he had made himself happily at home, again the sailor-lad on shore-leave. The events which had taken place at the fair last year were repeated here; he became the housekeeper's sweetheart and bought her a ring. She was from Bergen, an attractive and high-spirited lady with

a high breast and shining eyes. That August, that August! He had had ample opportunity to drink *brændevin* from the keg during the past summer, but had never once done it; he was no real drinker; first there must be gay spirits and girls and fun, first there must be shore-leave and sailor-boys cutting up. Good!

The ladies were doing everything possible to amuse August; the hostess called him Captain and offered him a room on shore as long as he lay in port. And the girls were given tips for no more than coming in and showing themselves for a brief moment. When Edevart arrived, he found a lively party in progress; when August began to play, the housekeeper took Edevart by storm and waltzed him around, whereupon August laughed good-naturedly and encouraged them: 'That's right, let's see how you can swing that mate of mine!' As for Edevart, nothing in the world could cheer him up—wherever he went he carried a sweet but painful memory and it did no good that he had acquired a watch and chain with which he might show off.

Things continued in this fashion until very late in the day; but at length August felt less willing to go on playing the accordion. The housekeeper didn't admire him enough; on the contrary she became far too anxious to chat with his mate and dance with him. Once she even danced the lad off into a dark corner where she threw her arms about him with a deep 'Ah!' At that, August wrinkled his brow with suspicion and put his instrument away and would play no more. 'Let's have something to eat; come on with the coffee!' he cried, in order to give the housekeeper something to do.

When night came, Edevart went back on board, but August couldn't endure even the mention of going to sleep; he called for a new bottle and was rewarded by having all the women in the house sit up with him and listen to his tales of adventure. Along toward morning one after

the other of them slipped away and August flopped into bed fully dressed; and there he lay, muttering crossly to himself, his head buzzing with plans to revenge himself on that housekeeper, his sweetheart, because she was nowhere to be found. Ay, he would give it to her!

A day and a night went by and now August was so tired he slept right through. When he awoke and counted up how much of his money he had squandered, he immediately came to and thereafter didn't touch a single drop of liquor. He was in a pitiful state. Edevart came up from the sloop and urged him to return on board; he had read the weather report and thought there would be wind enough to sail. They both looked up at the sky and talked it over and were agreed. August went into the house to settle for his room; he was gone a long while and when he came out again he said: 'I can't understand what's become of her.'

Edevart: 'I saw her down at the dock late last night.'

'At the dock? Well, she's a nice one!'

'Maybe she was looking for you?' suggested Edevart.

'No, she knew where I was. Did she come to see you on board?'

Edevart might have answered yes, she had done that very thing! But he spared his comrade's feelings and said that she was probably taking a walk to get a little fresh air.

'Ay, happy journey to her!' said August.

Edevart: 'Then you won't get your ring back?'

'Yes, I'll get my ring back!' sneered August. 'Now this I may as well tell you, Edevart: these women-folk aren't to be trusted.'

They went aboard and immediately set sail.

August had a hang-over and was in a dull mood, but he had nothing left to do but to set his teeth and go to work. They found steady weather and a more favourable

wind, but this did not improve August's frame of mind; he kept complaining that he had never felt so all in—it was because of the sherry, that's what it was; and then it was also because of that poisonous coffee and at last those two bottle of Crambambuli Cream which he had to drink with the ladies in the course of the night. That was a fine thing to do!

Edevart had heard that a glass of *brændevin* taken straight in small doses would help. With that August spat far out over the rail of the ship and explained that the idea of it turned his stomach.

That crazy fool! Surely his little drinking bouts could never once be considered as terrific outbursts of the joy of living; it was only that he had nothing else to do, no reserve to fall back on. And nothing but time would be able to cure him.

One morning when Edevart appeared on deck August was at the helm and now the devil surely must have been let loose in him, for he beckoned his comrade sharply to him and said: 'We won't be going in to Bergen. You needn't look at me that way; we won't be going to Bergen now and you can count on that. We've passed Bergen.'

Edevart, incredulously: 'What are you talking about!'

'Do you think it's so very funny? Now we'll be making money and getting somewhere!' The watery blue in August's eyes became hard and cold; he announced that he was on his way to Spain with the *Seagull* where he would sell the cargo and the vessel and become a rich man; Edevart was to be in on it, they would stick together. 'You needn't think that I don't know the way,' said he. 'Didn't I buy me these charts? We'll head straight down to South Norway and set out across the North Sea, then we'll go through the Channel and down the whole coast of France to Santander and there we are in Spain. I'm well acquainted with Barcelona, but we can't go there, for

it lies on the other side and we'd have to get into the Mediterranean Sea. That's twice as far, so anyway—'

All these names and places made no impression upon Edevart; he merely asked: 'Shall I take the helm?'

August ignored the question. 'I know what you're thinking of,' said he. 'You're afraid the craft will be posted and recognized. But I know a way out of that, for I've been through it once before: we'll sneak into some place on the coast of Scotland and paint her over and give her another name. Not a soul will know her again no matter how much they cable.'

'Your talk is more than sinful,' said Edevart.

'Who do you think will be hurt by it?' asked August. 'Skaaro himself is dead. And for that matter not even that Skaaro was an angel of God or an apostle of the Lord, let me tell you that. What do you think he wanted with Ragna down in the cabin anyway? You mustn't always think the best of folk; mother or daughter, it didn't make any difference to him, that swine!'

'Oh, let's leave Skaaro in peace!'

August: 'I merely mention it. Ay, that Skaaro is dead, and when a man is dead he doesn't mind anything we do. Was he even married? No! The skippers up north told me that he didn't have any kind of a family; some second cousins of his from Hardanger would come and take over the ship, they said. Do you think that's right? That I should just hand over the ship to those second cousins of his!'

Edevart: 'How can you stand there and talk like that!'

But August stuck to his guns and he didn't seem to be joking either. The sheer impossibility of his scheme put wind in his sails; he wanted Skipper Skaaro's watch, money and full-loaded vessel for himself; what was there remarkable about that? 'I know what you're thinking about,' he continued. 'But there's only one way out of that: we won't have Teodor with us. Ho, a clown with a

rupture? No, thanks! He'd simply squeal everything like an old woman.'

Edevart sighed, bored with the whole idea; simply to say something he asked: 'Then we two alone would sail the sloop to Spain?'

'No, no, we would take on a new man in some Scotch port.'

'Well, and how would we get rid of Teodor?'

'In the North Sea—heave him overboard.'

'Ha-ha-ha!' laughed Edevart heartily.

August was displeased with this laughter; wasn't he still the skipper of the ship? He would maintain his authority. It was his intention always to be reasonable, but his wild mood now got the better of him and he blurted out: 'I'll shoot him first!'

Edevart looked at his skipper in amazement and said: 'Now you've gone crazy!'

'Stand right where you are!' screamed August at once. 'Don't you set yourself up against a ship's discipline, for that's mutiny. Stand right where you are! It's too late to do anything about it, I tell you; we've gone past Bergen.'

'Then we'll turn around,' said Edevart.

'We'll not turn around!' answered August.

Edevart's face went pale; he went forward and called sharply: 'Teodor, on deck with you! We're going to turn around!'

August fell silent. He stood still for a while before giving in, and even so, he refused to seem defeated. No, he forced himself to be amused and said: 'Ha-ha-ha, you took me seriously. It's just as I always said, you aren't as bright as you might be. Come on, let's turn around!'

Teodor came on deck, they turned around and headed for Bergen.

For a time August let it appear that his grand scheme had been nothing but a huge joke. But just the same he asked Edevart how he thought it would have gone

with him aboard a regular ship if he had set himself up in opposition to the captain. He would have been shot down.

When they lay in Bergen harbour he reckoned up with his two men and paid them their wages. Everything according to regulations. He became Edevart's comrade again and bolstered himself up after his defeat by giving advice: 'Now you must listen to me and take good care of yourself here in Bergen and not fall into the clutches of any swindlers. How's that watch of yours, is it still going?'

'It has never done anything else.'

'It will be stopping soon enough. I haven't got time to show you around, for I'm going to deliver the sloop. But anyway you must go uptown yourself first to one big jewellery store and then to another big jewellery store and find out what that watch of yours is worth, and if it is wound up and set by the chronometer. Then we'll get together back here and pack up our stuff.'

Not a word was spoken to Teodor.

Edevart went uptown; he bought himself some necessary clothes and large and small gifts to take back home with him; neither did he forget to visit a jewellery store. Round about him on the walls hundreds of clocks were ticking, but each told a different time. Two young lads were sitting at a table and fussing with little gold wheels and other watch parts; one of them got up and looked at Edevart's watch and talked with him about it—where he had bought it and how much he had paid for it. During this conversation a man came out from an inside room and took over the examination of the watch. He screwed a glass into his eye and squinted. 'A very fine watch,' said he. 'Excellent works! Where did you buy it? From Papst?' asked the jeweller in astonishment; and when he learned the price, he was even more astonished. He set it by a clock in a mahogany case on the counter and handed it back.

'That's a funny clock!" said Edevart of the one in the mahogany case.

'That's a chronometer,' said the jeweller.

Edevart went into another large jewellery store, a whole shop made of glass. A young lady stood behind the counter; she called in an old grey-haired man who screwed a glass into his eye, peered into Edevart's watch, asked the same questions and was equally amazed by the answers he received. He also asked Edevart at this point where he came from and what had brought him to Bergen; the jeweller appeared to be puzzled as to whether or not Edevart had stolen the watch. At length he said: 'If all that you say is true, you have made a good bargain!' He took two shining watches from a glass case and said: 'I could give you both these watches for that one of yours.'

'I don't want to trade,' said Edevart.

It was lucky that August had had his fling in Florø and had now regained his poise; here in Bergen he suffered no temptation to give himself further shore-leave. As soon as he had delivered the *Seagull* and completed his transactions with Skaaro's two relatives from Hardanger, he was in a hurry to be off to the north again. They no longer had any reason to remain; the two Haringers were not the kind to strike up a friendship with—they had elaborately scrutinized the pay-roll and investigated and gone into petty details, although any one could see that the figures were clear and correct. Why, for example, should they sit so long and ponder over that item which had to do with sail-repairing at Florø? They even seemed to want to remove the sails again in order to see what had been done to them. But that was the way with folk who inherited things, they never seemed to get enough!

When August boarded the north-bound steamer he appeared sure enough to have been picked clean; no longer was he wearing a watch-chain stretched across his vest-front, no longer did he carry a pocket-book stuffed with

another man's money—and, as for baggage, a round seaman's bag was all he carried. But not even now was August's condition what it appeared to be! He had managed to rescue the charts for himself by adding a bit to his entries for provisions; and in that bag of his there was also a pair of sea-boots for which Skaaro now had no further use. In spite of their quibbling, the two Haringers had not been too particular; they were surprised and impressed because there was so much *brændevin* left in the keg after a whole summer's tapping and they overlooked more than one obscure entry in the book because August seemed such an accurate fellow.

The return voyage proved tedious for August and Edevart; one day was like another and they could hardly wait to be back home.

August was active as always; he unrolled his navigation charts for the benefit of the other passengers; pointed out lighthouses and reefs and other sea marks and was willing to explain everything. And once more he was flashing a watch-chain.

'So you got that watch of Skaaro's after all?' asked Edevart.

'Didn't I have to buy it!' answered August in an offended tone.

A wave of suspicion crossed Edevart's mind and he asked: 'Why haven't you worn it before this? And why were you in such a hurry to get away from Bergen?'

August flared: 'What do you mean? Wouldn't it have been a waste of money if we had waited for the next steamer? You ought to be grateful to me for that!'

In spite of all that, Edevart could not rid himself of his suspicions and August was well aware of it. A feeling of tension arose betwen the two comrades. Edevart didn't hesitate to deride a bit that wonderful scheme of sailing down to Spain and August felt called upon to defend it: 'If only I had had a revolver,' said he. 'You wouldn't have

dared to set yourself up against a ship's command, Edevart, my lad. I wanted to go in to Trondhjem and get me a revolver, but that fool sheep took up all the time. I tried to get me a revolver in Kristianssund and in Aalesund, but there wasn't a single one to be had.'

Edevart: 'H'm, then you are a murderer, if I understand you right.'

August stormed at this: 'I can't be bothered answering you!' he roared. 'You're a regular cry-baby like that Teodor! You can't let go of your mother's apron-strings! Do you know what we could have done? Well then, I'll tell you: In Spain we could have bought a clipper and sailed her into the Pacific and been safe from the whole wide world. . .'

August did not seem able to convince his comrade, and he was plainly affected because their relations were no longer as friendly as before. While the steamer was lying over at Trondhjem, August went ashore alone; he was depressed and thoughtful. When he came aboard again, it was merely to fetch his things; he had joined the crew of a bark bound for Riga.

When it became clear to Edevart that August was in earnest, he greatly regretted the quarrel which had driven his comrade to such a course. 'You mustn't do it,' said he. 'You must come home with me. We have been through so much together; you don't want to part company now, do you?'

'I'm just going to Riga, a short voyage, nothing at all. If you want me for anything, write care of the Norwegian Consul. The bark's name is the *Soleglad*.'

Both lads were downcast, but there was nothing to be done about it; August had signed on for the voyage. He gave Edevart his gold ring and would not hear of his refusing it. He then mentioned the cruise to Spain again and asked Edevart to keep still about it when he had returned home.

'I'll never say a word,' said Edevart.

'No, don't you do it,' said August. 'Shake hands on it?'

Edevart, surprised: 'Ay, that I can always do.'

'Then it's just like an oath on the Bible. You can't ever escape it, so I have heard. Your soul would be lost.'

The parting from August was no light matter for Edevart. He thought it over. In a way he would now be more free to do as he liked, but the thought did not bring him all the satisfaction it might have; a place became empty at his side. During these two years of knocking about with August, he had learned one thing and another, his viewpoint had become broader, the village at home had ceased to be the entire world for him, for many folk had he seen, and ships and cities and landscapes. August was a good lad, after all, a remarkable fellow in many ways—happy journey to him!

Edevart was slightly dazed as he walked about the steamer; now he was alone and sad, for Teodor was certainly not a man to confide in.

When the steamer stopped off at Fosenø, Edevart stepped into the launch and went ashore.

CHAPTER FIVE

THERE on the shore of the little green cove the houses lay listening to the murmur of the waterfall and Lovisa Margreta Doppen and the children were just as they had been before; scantily clad, silent and sweet, they stood outside the cottage and watched him coming. The young woman smiled uncertainly; in his brand-new clothes Edevart seemed somewhat changed, and her glance wavered. She stammered something such as: 'What is this I see—!'

He set down his bundle and timidly took her hand in greeting. '*Goddag!*' he said. 'I just happened to be passing this way.' The fact that he now stood there in an obviously prosperous condition, dressed in all his new clothes, gave him some confidence, otherwise it is doubtful that he could have uttered a single word.

'Am I really seeing you again who were so clever and helped me!' said she brightly and straightforwardly, although her face went red. 'Did you come in a boat? Where is the sloop?'

'We delivered the sloop in Bergen. No, you see I just happened to be thinking of that sheep of yours: we forgot to block up that path to keep it from going out on the ledge and getting caught all over again. I just wanted to come and see about that.'

She clapped her hands. 'No! Did you really think of that?'

In order to make his visit seem plausible and casual he explained that his comrade, the Skipper, had left him in Trondhjem and was off to sea again. And so since he was now by himself, said he with a soft laugh, he could just as well stop off and do this little job.

'Good Heavens!' she whispered, overcome at his easy manner.

No, there wasn't any doubt about it, new clothes, a watch and a gold ring and money in his pocket helped to make a man of Edevart; he spoke grandly to the children and nodded: 'I brought along some trifles for you.'

Lovisa Margreta: 'Won't you come into our house, poor as it is?'

The young woman had not been idle during the past weeks; she was weaving a rug and was well along with her task; oh, and the rug was a work of art in many colours and rich design. 'This is the way I make my living,' said she. 'I spin the wool myself and dye it, too. Wool from my own sheep.'

'Wonder of wonders!' said Edevart, without understanding. 'Make your living—but how?'

'I send my rugs to Trondhjem and from there they go even farther. I have had them exhibited too and got a diploma.'

He shook his head in wonder over these things that he heard and it took no more than this to make her childishly proud. 'Do you like this piece? H'm, really? Oh, but I've woven many finer rugs than this; this one here is more for everyday use.'

'Where did you learn to weave?' he asked.

'Learn it? That I don't exactly know. Little by little, I suppose. My mother taught me to spin and weave when I was little.'

He opened his bag and the children received their presents—look there, these were the very things he had bought in Bergen and was going to take home with him to his little brothers and sisters; here he was giving them away to others—a silk handkerchief to the girl, a wonderful jack-knife to the boy and a pair of much-too-large shoes to each of them. They had to be reminded by their

mother to say their thanks, so absorbed were they in their treasures.

'This is all too good of you!' said she to Edevart.

When she had given her guest something to eat and drink she took him out and showed him the little shed which sheltered one cow and ten sheep, showed him the hay barn, the steep path down to the river, the wood shed and all else that was hers. Everything was orderly and clean. Beside the cottage, right under its eaves, there stood a little storehouse; she turned the key which had been left in the door and, beaming with pride, showed him in. There from the rafters hung several finished rugs, there were also flour and other provisions, a couple of skirts and a single Sunday dress, a little wool, a little butter, some sheepskins. She apparently did not consider herself so badly off since she took pains to let a stranger see all this; she exhibited her possessions as though they had been her family silver. He looked at everything and thought exactly as she did that this was a great deal, that it was more than enough. 'My, but they are grand!' said he.

Happy creatures! It is something after all to be next to nothing oneself.

He went to his bag to take out his working clothes; he was planning to climb the cliff. She suggested—ay, he must of course do what he wanted to, but—wouldn't he prefer to stay overnight? He could wait until the following day with that job of fencing off the path to the dangerous ledge; to-day he ought to rest. And to-morrow, right enough, it will be Sunday—he must do just as he thinks best, but Monday, too, will be a day—.

She rattled all this off in a single breath, possibly to cover up her embarrassment.

Ay, and thanks. He could stay over if she liked. He could sleep in the hay.

Ay. And he should have beautiful rugs under him and over him, many rugs. . .

So that was a photograph of her husband over there on the wall, eh? August had said that he was a handsome man. H'm, fine standards of beauty they must possess abroad to judge that fellow handsome! Tousled hair, crooked nose, a wild look in his eyes, enormous mouth. Edevart asked how old he was and with that he repeated the words of August: 'A handsome man!'

'Ay,' said Lovisa Margreta. 'A handsome man. He danced better than all the others and he was wonderful at playing the accordion.'

'August, too,' explained Edevart. 'He played the accordion. August, that Skipper of mine that you saw. Oh, he was a wizard at it! They say up north where I live that he learned it at the Wittenberg School.'

'H'm,' said she. 'That husband of mine was so spry that he could walk a good way on his hands, and do you see that clothes-pole out there? Ay, he could jump that high with his feet together.'

'No!' said Edevart incredulously.

'It's just as I'm saying. Anyway, almost as high as that.'

'That's a hard thing to do.'

'He was a wonderful singer, too. But he was too wild in the head and so now he must have gotten into trouble—in America, I mean. And then again he became too fond of strong drink, for he was a bright fellow and was invited everywhere, so that in the end it got the better of him.'

'I can't make out why he doesn't write.'

'Ay; no, he doesn't write. But it may well turn out that some day a letter will come or that he will come himself. What do you think?'

Edevart shook his head and did not reply.

'He used to sing so nicely,' she continued dreamily. She enumerated his accomplishments, all that had attracted her to him; in fact she seemed to be remembering him with affection.

'Ay, but that he never writes—'

'No,' said she. 'But he was a funny fellow that way. He told me himself when he went away that he wouldn't write until he had done something worth writing about, until he had made a lot of money and become well off. Maybe in five years, he said.'

'And you and the children were to stay here without getting anything from him?'

'I don't know. He knew well enough that we wouldn't starve to death here at Doppen, because I could weave. I began to weave some time before he went away, for he wasn't earning anything any more.'

They sit and talk together, these young creatures, and any one may listen to what they say, for there is no evil in their words.

That evening she was making a bed for him in the hay barn and it was natural that he should have gone along to carry the heavy rugs for her. Together they rustled around in the hay; she became downright motherly toward him and let it be known that she knew a great deal more about making a bed than he did. Sometimes they laughed together, healthy laughter, there was no reason why she should hang her head!

When she left, he followed her and couldn't seem to let her go, so deep had become his love for her. He let her understand this, too, in the small humble words that he spoke and was embarrassed when he stroked her arm. This was a bold gesture on his part, but she did not take it amiss; she shook her head and softly laughed at him; he was young and good-looking, a husky lad who had been reared on hard work—ay, she accepted his tenderness.

Outside she peeked in through the window to see if the children were sleeping soundly and had not thrown off their bed-clothes; she said to Edevart that they could go and sit inside again if he liked, to-morrow would be Sunday and they didn't have to get up early.

But it was evident that they could not talk inside; the children became restless in bed—they were not used to hearing conversation in the house at night and at last the girl opened her eyes and said: 'Mama, what's that?'

'Nothing, go to sleep.'

No, they couldn't sit here and be disturbing the children, and so they walked back over to the hay barn. Nothing took place between them, nothing—except that they bashfully held hands while he was telling her how his mind had been filled with nothing but her all during his voyage to Bergen. Oh, all this was so youthful, so silly, and yet so sweet. Now and then he would wet his dry lips with his tongue and never seemed able to raise his eyes; his heart was thumping. 'H'm,' he would say now and then in a big, gruff voice simply to buck himself up. Perhaps this had not been at all necessary; there she sat and smiled and listened to him and for her own part was probably also in love—at least that's how it seemed, for when she left she gave him a kiss. Oh, heavens above, he kissed her! It just happened; he did not ask her, but their lips met.

He nestled himself under the rugs without taking off his clothes; it was as though he wanted to shut himself off from the world and lie there hugging his happy secret to himself.

From now on they sat every evening in the hay barn for they could not stay in the cottage and disturb the children. There was always something to talk about, and they were never too tired to hit upon something new. He told her how difficult it had been for him to find his way back to her. When he had left the steamer and come ashore, he could find no one who knew where Doppen was. 'A place called Doppen?' they asked. 'No.' But there was one young man who had said: 'But I used to know a man called Haakon Doppen.' 'Ay,' another had answered, 'I knew him too.'

'Ay, and that was that husband of mine!' exclaimed

Lovisa Margreta. 'There, you see, he was known to everyone,—a famous lad!'

Edevart, surprised: 'Your husband? No! They said that he was in prison.'

'Well—no, then it wasn't him,' she faltered.

'In Trondhjem, they told me.'

She shook her head decisively: 'No, no, then it couldn't have been him. It must have been some one else they were talking about.'

Edevart continued: 'Anyhow, I got the two young lads to row me over here. None of us knew the way, there are so many green coves between the steamer landing and here; and we all three rowed a long time. But then I remembered where we had sailed in with the sloop for water that time and heard the sound of the waterfall—then I knew where I was again. Ay, for there isn't a green cove anywhere as pretty as this one here.'

'Is that what you think?' said Lovisa Margreta. 'Ay, and so do I, too!'

Edevart: 'I only wish I could stay here for always.'

'Ay,' said she thoughtfully. 'I wish so, too, but . . .'

And this was the way they would sit and talk when evening came. In the morning they were both at their work, she at her hand-loom and he out-of-doors. He had been here for over a week now and had long ago fenced off the path to the ledge. He found other important things to do as well, fixing the fences and tidying things up about the place; now he had decided to get rid of some cursed stones out in the hayfield, stones that were always getting in the way of the scythe.

But he couldn't do that alone, she objected.

He didn't know. Perhaps he couldn't do it alone. But in any case he would have to have a crowbar.

Oh, yes, they had sufficient things to chat about: where was he to get hold of a crowbar; where could he either borrow or buy a crowbar? At the trading station, but that

was a long way yonder, across the mountain; Lovisa Margreta made the journey there but once a month at most. There were two small pioneer settlements nearer by, but these would hardly boast of a crowbar. They talked and talked.

In the morning Edevart improvised a crowbar as best he could. He trimmed two poles from stout rowan wood and began to clear the field. One stone after another he dug up and each hole he filled with earth and turf. Sometimes he needed extra weight on his pole and then both the children would climb upon it—ay, in a pinch even Lovisa Margreta herself would—and all bore down with all their weight. It seemed great fun to the four of them, this clearing a field of stones. A family clearing their land.

After the noonday meal Edevart planned to return to his work. He had had porridge and milk, good sturdy food, but Lovisa Margreta had certainly wished better for him; she complained because she had no fish to give him. It delighted him to see this solicitude of hers and to feel that she had made him her partner in keeping her household, that they had become almost like man and wife. She asked him to go out to the storehouse and cut a shank from one of the sheepskins, crush it and bring her the grease as she wanted to begin spinning and first must grease her loom.

Edevart went. He sneaked off to get a large cardboard box which had lain in his bag all the time. In the box was the present he had bought in Bergen for his mother; a fine all-wool skirt and a shawl, a kind of cape without sleeves which was all the rage now and which in his home village was called a 'vamp.' He hung the garments hastily on the wall, cut the leg from the sheepskin and left the storehouse again.

When he came into the room with the grease he said

that he would have to set out for the trading station at once. He had been thinking about it for a long time.

She looked at him. 'What is this?' she murmured. 'Must you be leaving?'

'No, no, I just want to look around; I'll have to have a crowbar after all. These wooden poles aren't any good, they bend.'

She breathed easily again. 'I was afraid you would be going on your way.'

He laughed and answered: 'I'll be here until you chase me!'

She sadly shook her head and sat silent for a time. 'I'll go along and start you in the right direction,' said she and rose from the loom. 'A narrow path leads to the first two places and from there there is a good wide road. But you must stay overnight at the trading station and not come back till to-morrow.'

They stood and looked at each other up there on the hill-top where they were to part. She was bare-footed as usual and wore nothing more than a skirt and blouse, but now, hot and flushed from walking, her nostrils dilated, she was pretty indeed. This was surely no gorgeous costume she was wearing, but it was all she had need for and she was satisfied.

'Ask at the post office when you are there if there is a letter for me,' she said.

He was gone twenty-four hours. She had washed and mended his clothes and had done all that a mother might do for him. But now a full day had gone by and he really must soon be coming. In the storehouse he had left some fine holiday clothes for her—she had not missed the point of this; he had had but one motive and his shyness went to her heart. Was she longing for him to return or was she indifferent? She was not exactly troubled with anxiety; nevertheless she began to climb the path up the side of the

mountain, perhaps to help him carry things. When she reached the top of the first hill she happened to look around and saw that a little way out in the cove a man was rowing a boat toward shore. It was Edevart. Ay, of course he was rowing; he could not carry that heavy crowbar such a long way cross-country. She ran down the path and met him on the beach. He had bought a crowbar; he had also bought this boat and some fishing-tackle—he was going fishing out in the cove.

'Heavens and earth, what a one you are!' said she.

What? This was nothing at all, nothing to brag about; fishing was simply a-b-c for him, and as for the boat, it wasn't new . . .

'But heavens and earth, all this you are doing for me and all this you are thinking about for me!' said she, overcome. 'And you have hung up some fine clothes for me in the storehouse; I can't find anything to say . . .'

They went up from the boat; she helped him to carry packages and things; food, a couple more things to wear, tools. The children received candy and cookies, Lovisa Margreta a white collar for her blouse—if she wouldn't disdain the gift! Besides all this, he laid on the table a couple of new spoons.

That was good, they needed spoons. He thought of everything.

And now there was joy all over the house. Edevart himself was perhaps the happiest of them all. Lovisa Margreta came up and leaned against him for a moment; she was merely passing his chair, hardly touched his shoulder, but a sweet warmth surged up in him and he caught a deep breath.

Food was placed before him but he could hardly eat; they drank coffee and ate more of the cakes he had brought home; nothing was lacking. While Lovisa Margreta was opening packages and stowing the provisions away in the cupboard, he stealthily drank what was left

of her coffee and he placed his lips where hers had been.

It was well on into the evening, but they were not to go to bed before something sad and strange took place, something oh, so sad and strange!

Lovisa Margreta remembered to ask: 'Did they have a letter for me?'

Ay—of course they had a letter for her. He had nearly forgotten all about it.

As soon as she saw the handwriting, a tense expression came over her face; she opened the letter and cried suddenly: 'It's from Haakon!'

Edevart and the children watched her while she was reading; first she turned pale and then she flushed; halfway through she cried out: 'An act of mercy, great mercy, ay—no, no, no!—oh!—'

'Is it from that husband of yours?' asked Edevart.

'Ay!' she rejoiced and stood up. 'Now he is coming, children. Now papa is coming! Do you understand, papa is coming!'

Edevart wet his parched lips and said: 'But the letter is from Trondhjem; didn't I see that?'

'From Trondhjem? No. Oh, yes, he is in Trondhjem on his way from America. Look here, Trondhjem is marked right on the stamp. But to think that he is coming now, a whole year early! I mean a year sooner than he said. It was the Grace of God that sent you to the trading station, for he will just stay there a little while to get used to things, after his journey I mean, and then he will come!' And unconsciously the young housewife began to clear up the room and set things in order.

Edevart went out. He went down to the river and sat there a while thinking, thinking. What now was there for him to do? What was he to do with a crowbar and what was he to do with a boat?

Later, when he was certain that Lovisa Margreta had

put the children to bed, he walked back up to the house again. She came out at once; she said that she had read over the letter once more and expected her husband at any time.

'H'm,' said Edevart.

She showed no signs of following him over to the hay barn as she had on evenings past and seemed on the whole quite changed, quite absent-minded and full of her own thoughts. When he started off to bed she did not follow after him. He looked back once, but she showed no sign of coming and he refused to ask her. With defiance and deep unhappiness in his heart he lay down in the hay taking off his clothes so that he wouldn't be tempted to go back to her.

Then after a little she came to him. She knelt down in the hay; she seemed to feel she had acted badly toward him and had come to make friends.

'You mustn't take it so hard,' she began, and explained further the things that had to be explained: that there was no way out of it, but that time would cure the pain, she would go back to the common, everyday virtues which had comforted her once, God knows, when her husband went away.

Edevart remained darkly silent.

'It can't be otherwise,' she continued. 'But God bless you and all thanks and praise to you for being so good to me.'

'I can't understand what I'm to do,' said he.

'You? Oh, you'll soon find you a girl,' she answered. 'As for me, I am married and can never be anything to you.' With this she seemed on the point of getting up and going away.

How hurt and unreasonable he became! She didn't seem to be suffering at all—she didn't seem to care one way or the other! Why, what was the woman made of! He threw his arms about her and pulled her down to him. Ay, she

cared nothing for him; she had thrown him over, deceived him shamefully—but he still wanted her!

'You don't love me,' he said.

'I do, I do!' she answered. 'Oh, as if I didn't love you! I have thought about you more than—I have thought about you a great deal; you are so handsome and you have such blue eyes. What do you want me to say? Tell me and I'll say it! But as things are now—you must get you another girl, dear, for surely you can see that I'm married. Oh, I don't know what we are going to do—'

'Can't I still stay on? No, I can't do that very well.'

'Here?' she asked in amazement. 'No.'

'But somewhere near? At the trading station?'

'No, no; you mustn't think of it. My husband would catch on.'

'H'm, so then you're in love with him?'

'Ay,' she said: 'But I can never thank you enough for all you have been to me.'

They lay there quietly for a time; then he took her and kissed her and she let him; but when he shyly and unskillfully attempted more she said: 'No, I don't dare.'

Miserable with embarrassment he hid his face against her breast, and thus they lay for a while; he could hear her heart hammering under the thin blouse. Suddenly she took his head in her hands and kissed him; she whispered against his mouth: 'Do I dare?'

'Yes, do,' he whispered back.

And yes, of course, she dared, whether out of motherliness, compassion, love, God knows. She initiated him and their passion knew no bounds; long hours their turbulence lasted; a natural intoxication for each other. There were no tricks; his passion was insatiable and she never once cried out for mercy.

In the grey light of dawn she left him.

Oh, but this only made things worse. He had not slept more than an hour or two when she came back and, scan-

tily dressed as usual, aroused him. 'I'm so afraid that he will come,' said she.

'Let him come!' answered Edevart defiantly.

'No, no, you must be gone when he comes.'

He reached out his hand for her and wanted her again, but she drew herself away. He begged her, for it would be the last time; he was going away, they must part . . .

She had to smile at this and kissed him with a sudden rush of tenderness to her heart, but that was the worst thing she could have done for them both: 'God, how wild you are!' she whispered and gave in.

It was still early morning and the children were not up yet. Edevart was given a hasty meal; then he packed his bag and threw it over his back: 'It will be heavier carrying this to-day than it was the day I came,' said he.

'You certainly don't have to carry it, you have a boat.'

'What's that? Don't you want to keep the boat?'

'I don't dare do that,' she said. 'A boat—no. But the other things I might have bought myself, so those will be all right for him to see when he comes.'

Edevart: 'But won't the children be telling him anyway that I've been here?'

'Ay. But I will say that I had a man working for me who came and was nice to me and dug up stones. You must take the crowbar with you.'

'No!' answered Edevart. 'Set *him* to work digging up stones—now he has a crowbar to work with!'

She thought this over. 'Ay, ay, the workman might have left his crowbar behind, but a boat—that would be too much.'

Then he stood ready to leave. Her mouth began to tremble and she said: 'And now I suppose I'll never be seeing you again in this life?'

'I don't know,' he answered downheartedly. 'Would you have liked me to stay on?'

She, whispering: 'Ay, that I would . . .'

He caught his breath as he ran with his bag down to the sea, but that was for joy over her answer; a great good fortune had become his. And as he rowed out to sea she stood outside the house and waved as long as he remained in sight.

The trader's name was Knoff. He owned considerable land on which stood a white-painted main building and two enormous warehouses each of them four stories high; in the harbour lay a fishing sloop and schooner and on shore were many houses and workshops.

Knoff himself was an active and lordly gentleman, proud of his plant and his own ability, not so free from conceit as he might have been, nor at all times so outlandishly honest either, but none the less looked up to as a most excellent man in the district. But he was vain enough to address his wife as 'Madam' and he christened his two children Romeo and Juliet. He was a man of many affairs: farming, boat-building, baking, coopering. His greatest sorrow was that the Nordland mail steamers sailed right past his trading station and chose for their port of call a place some distance south of him. Ay, just as they had always done. It was not merely a question of pride with him either; it cost him a good bit of money to haul all his goods home from the steamer landing. He had been working for a long time now to have this situation changed.

When Edevart applied to him for work, he said no at first and was rough and ungracious. He asked Edevart what he could do. Edevart thought that he could make himself useful, no matter what they gave him to do. Could he saw wood and pile it, look after the horses, row a boat, keep books in the office, help out in the bakery? Edevart smilingly answered that he could perform one or another of these tasks. 'Yes,' said Knoff. 'But I have people for these already.'

Now Edevart had learned a thing or two from his comrade, August, and he said: 'I see two vessels in the harbour, both big craft; have you got crew enough for them?'

Knoff thought it over. 'They are lying there because they have been down to Trondhjem with the fish. They will sail to Lofoten this winter, but it isn't even autumn now and you can't wait until then.'

Edevart remained silent at this. Why of course it was autumn now, it was late September and early in the morning the field pools were coated with ice. It was well on into autumn . . .

'Are you a good sailor?' asked Knoff. 'Have you ever been on a vessel before?'

Ay, that he had, and he knew Lofoten well.

'Yes? But you are not thinking of getting command of one of the vessels?'

'No,' answered Edevart. 'But I'll do whatever you say.'

Knoff looked at him and put on further airs. He became a mighty man who had no time for petty details right now. He said: 'At all events, I have my old skipper for the schooner. Have you ever gone along and bought up fish?'

'Aye,' answered Edevart.

'Where do you come from? From that steamer-stop down south?'

'No, I helped sail a fish sloop to Bergen and I'm now on my way up from there.'

He was an attractive youth, well dressed and had a gold ring and a watch; he appealed to the lordly chief and therefore did not receive a definite refusal. 'Come back and see me in an hour,' said the Master and looked at his watch. 'I haven't any time for you now.'

Edevart walked down the road toward the warehouses and, overcome with fatigue, threw himself down on the ground. He was tired and upset after his recent expe-

riences. Already earlier in the day he had had a hard time of it to tear himself away from Doppen and come down here and introduce himself at the trading station; he had had no leisure to think things over, even his conversation with Knoff had been entirely unpremeditated.

While he was living over the marvels of the night before, he could hardly keep silent, but lay whispering to himself. A revolution had taken place within him and his whole inner life was billowing with wonder and gratefulness. How strange it all was!

Placing his hand over his face, he could sense again her tenderness, could see her brown eyebrows, delicate and straight as the strokes of a brush—and they had a certain expression of their own those eyebrows, as though they were strangers to her otherwise ordinary grey eyes. Lovisa Margreta, dear sweet Lovisa Margreta! He would not row back up to Doppen and make it hard for her, he would simply seek work down here—his single aspiration was to be somewhere near her.

Just as though he had been given a definite appointment, he kept careful track of the time and when he again stood before Knoff, he knew he was not a minute out of the way. Knoff took out his watch once more, looked at it and nodded. 'On the dot! You can stay on here by all means,' said he. 'Possibly you can help out at the warehouse; some flour has just come in. And further than that —we'll see— What's your name?'

'Edevart Andreassen.'

Oh, that Knoff, who always must appear high and mighty! 'Knoff' was a grand sounding name, and so was 'Romeo'—he wrote a note on a slip of paper, mentioned the name of 'Edward Andrésen' and said: 'Hand this to the foreman at the warehouse.'

'Right,' said Edevart.

As the days passed, he helped in turn the warehouse man, the baker and the boat carpenter. He was called

wherever he was needed and he went when he was called. He slept in the baker's bedroom and took his meals in the kitchen. Not so bad. And sure enough, autumn had come to stay; it set in during October; time passed, he didn't die, he survived his love affair.

The place swarmed with workmen, farm hands, store clerks and servants. Knoff turned no one away, especially if they had in vain sought work at the steamer stop south. How that little steamer stop preyed upon Knoff's mind! It was only an old country store on a headland, but it had a liquor license, sold eggs and hen feathers and had scraped together a fair amount of money. But above all, it was the stopping place for steamers on the Vadsø-Hamburg line, and this was a painful thorn in Knoff's side. If a man were to be turned down there, he could with fair certainty count on a place with Knoff. 'How is that, aren't they doing anything down there?' he might say. 'Have they absolutely no use for help? I can't take care of all they hang around my neck. See here, hand this note to the head groundkeeper and ask him if he can't find some use for you in the woods!'

Edevart found himself well off; he was young and quick to learn; the girls in the kitchen took notice of the new man because of his good looks, and even the housekeeper, Jomfru Ellingsen, asked where he came from and what his name was. He could not complain that he was being ignored by folk; the children clung to his hand and asked him to help them with this and that, especially the boy, Romeo. And one day Madam Knoff, who was out on the lawn, called him to her and asked him to go down to the store and fetch peas for the pigeons. Every Sunday he appeared in fine clothes and spent the better part of the day with the most prominent of the working-men, the cooper and the baker. The head boat carpenter, too, was friendly and obliging; he had readily taken back the boat which Edevart had bought and refunded him his money

—he had power to do this, for he had been in Knoff's service a good while now and was permitted to make his own deals. From the boat carpenter and others Edevart learned a good bit about Haakon Doppen—ay, more than enough about Haakon Doppen.

Edevart went aboard both sloop and schooner and looked them over; trim craft he found them to be and well maintained. He was unfamiliar with the schooner's rig and sail arrangement, but the sloop was a regular one and caught his fancy.

It occurred to him to write August a letter, care of the bark *Soleglad* in Riga, telling him how things stood with him and the kind of work he was doing. Anxious to have his comrade back with him again, he raved about the place, about Knoff and everyone who lived here and in the end he invited August to come—if he came, he would be certain to get command of the sloop for her voyage to Lofoten. 'Think it over, answer requested! Postscript: If I know you at all, you won't think twice about cutting loose from the bark at Riga.'

After three weeks his letter was answered from Dünamünde. August declined the invitation: it was not his habit to desert Norwegian craft—he was far too honourable for that. The bark was now laying in a cargo of rye for her home voyage and would arrive back in Trondhjem the early part of December; at this time Edevart could come to Trondhjem and talk with him. Bark *Soleglad*. 'Friendly greetings from your comrade and God be with you!'

Heh, August was putting on airs! August was summoning him to Trondhjem! And perhaps, too, he had even turned religious . . .

The weeks passed and snow came; sleighs were out and Romeo and Juliet were on their skis. Knoff lay in bed with a cold; perhaps it was just fear of taking cold that ailed him—he was a coward. From his bed he took an

active interest in all that was going on and sent orders to each of his people in turn. Edevart became uneasy when, one Sunday after he had eaten his dinner, Jomfru Ellingsen came to him and said that Knoff desired to speak with him. Could that mean dismissal? She opened the door and showed him through the parlour to the main hall where they mounted a staircase to the second floor.

On his way through the house Edevart's eyes had been quick and sharp; he caught a glimpse of a glory he had never imagined: a mirror which reached from the floor to the ceiling; a sofa with a framework of gold; a piano and a daughter who could play it; Madam Knoff with golden jewellery on her breast; the tutor; office help; paintings in golden frames on the walls. He had been allowed to peep over the fence into another world, perhaps not a very high fence, but high enough for Edevart—the things he had caught a glimpse of he had never seen before.

Why had he been shown through the house? God knows if it hadn't been ordered so, if the lad hadn't been made to pass through this paradise in order to make him feel small, to make him feel like an ant. Edevart had heard of this well-calculated device on the part of the Chief.

He stepped into the bed-room and halted by the door.

Knoff said that it wasn't much he wanted of him and there was no mention of dismissal. After the manner of all big business men with very little time for words, Knoff spoke tersely: 'I hear from the office that you got some goods on credit last evening.'

'Ay, some oilskins,' answered Edevart, surprised.

'Why did you get them on credit?'

'I thought they could later be taken out of my wages.'

'Taken out of what? We haven't said anything about wages,' said Knoff. And with Edevart speechless at this, Knoff continued: 'I cannot pay you any wages to speak of at this time while you are simply going about here and waiting for a regular job.'

'H'm.'

'You can understand that, of course?'

'I'll pay for the oilskins,' said Edevart.

Knoff: 'Then you have money?'

Edevart: 'I'm not penniless.'

'That's fine,' said Knoff. 'No, as for wages and that sort of thing—you have your board and lodging and that ought to be enough in this off-season when I really have no regular work for you. You understand it is not exactly poverty that leads me to this decision, it's just my way of running things.'

Edevart became annoyed and said: 'I won't work here just for my meals.'

Knoff seemed to be amazed: 'What else do you expect? Winter is here and at least you have a roof over your head.'

Edevart: 'I'm leaving.'

'Where will you go?'

'To Trondhjem first.'

Knoff was silent a moment; 'Well, well, so you are going to Trondhjem. But I don't suppose you have anything to do after you get there?'

Edevart, briefly and to the point: 'Yes, I have!' With that he left.

He set out at once to pack his things; while he was packing, it occurred to him to return the oilskins which were new and unused, but then Knoff would naturally be under the impression that he had no money to pay for them. By rights he ought to take the oilskins along without paying for them at all. That's what August would have done; he would scarcely have waited over till Monday in order to go to the office and pay up such a trifling store account. Edevart had already learned to look less seriously upon honour and fairness in his business dealings; however he gave up the idea of sneaking away without paying chiefly on the grounds that unpleasant results might fol-

low: folk might hear of what he had done, and he was in Lovisa Margreta's neighbourhood.

Lovisa Margreta! Strange that no one from Doppen had come here to the trading station in all this time. Each day Edevart had kept watch and even made inquiries, but no one had seen anybody from there. The boat carpenter was of the opinion that Haakon Doppen was too much ashamed to show himself; it was also possible that, during his four years in prison, he had saved up some money and had bought his supplies in Trondhjem. But even so, Christmas would bring both Haakon and his wife to the trading station to buy what goods they needed.

On Monday morning, after Edevart had settled his account and was ready to set out, the head store clerk Lorensen came in with Knoff's word that Edevart was to be one of the sloop's crew with ordinary seaman's wages beginning to-day. Edevart was still disgruntled and said No, thanks, that the sloop wasn't ready to sail yet and that he would not take money from Knoff for nothing. 'Tell him that from me!'

Nevertheless, Edevart left his bag behind, in order that he might later have an excuse for coming back. He carried with him only a few clothes tied up in a bundle.

CHAPTER SIX

ALTHOUGH it was no later than the middle of November, the *Soleglad* was actually back home again and had begun to discharge her cargo. She had made a record voyage. Since several members of the crew lived here in Trondhjem and were spending their shore-leave at home, August obtained permission to keep Edevart with him on board; they were both overjoyed to meet again and there was much they had to talk over.

August wore any number of rings on his fingers now and a gold watch-chain embellished his breast. He scoffed at the idea of his coming up to Froland and taking a sloop to Lofoten. Oh, no, leave it to him, he had other plans in his head! August was very secretive about all that he held up his sleeve, but he would not hide from Edevart that he was on the point of becoming one of the world's most famous men. For example, in a few days there would be the fair at Levanger . . .

'What will you be doing there?'

'There? Wait and see!'

Not another word for the time being, but August, with a sweeping gesture of his hand, gave Edevart to understand that he had valuable goods hidden all over the good bark *Soleglad*.

That evening August sneaked down into the hold and produced eight full boxes of cigars, wrapped them in a cloth and gave them to Edevart to carry. 'We'll go up town,' said he. 'We'll go some place and do a little business, but you aren't to say a word.'

They went into a cigar store where it was evident that August had been before; he exchanged familiar greetings

and to Edevart's utter amazement, he was now almost unable to speak any Norwegian at all but used a lot of funny sounding words and a kind of sign language to make himself understood. He opened each box of cigars, exhibited the goods, smelled them, hammered the box shut again with a gleaming silver pocket knife and handed it over. Then he collected his money. August put this carelessly away in his pocket, nodded and said: '*Hoberpomere!*' 'Yes,' the cigar dealer answered. The comrades left.

'Did you sell the cigars?' asked Edevart.

'That was nothing, a couple of boxes,' said August. 'I wanted to help him out a little.'

Next evening they sold a dozen boxes in a grocery store; Edevart carried them to the place. The transaction took place in a back room where August opened up the boxes, exhibited the cigars, requested the grocer to smell them and held out his hand for the money. '*Hoberpomere!*'

'What was that you said when you were leaving?'

'*Hoberpomere? Haaper paa mere Handel!*' answered August. ' "Hope to do business with you again." That's the way a Russian talks Norwegian. I'm a Russian now. Hurry up, we'll make another trip this evening, it's after dark already.'

Edevart carried another dozen boxes of cigars to a little tobacco shop; there they found a lady standing behind the counter. She had bottles of wine as well as tobacco on her shelves. The lady smiled when they entered and showed them at once into a side room where there was a sofa, chairs and a table; she was a woman possibly in her thirties, tall and buxom, with a pretty face and a lively manner. She poured them some wine; they drank and August spoke funny words to her. Edevart kept silent. It was evident that the lady could not pay for the cigars this evening and August, with his golden smile, let it be understood that this made no difference to him, *nitchevo*. 'Let it stand over till a later evening,' said he in broken

Norwegian. Before they left he took her behind the door and kissed her; he seemed to reach some kind of an agreement with her, looked at his watch and talked his crazy language.

'Why are you a Russian?' asked Edevart.

August answered: 'To make them think better of me—and they do, too. You can do a better business if you're a foreigner. I sell cheaper than the other dealers and handle better cigars, extraordinary good cigars. But they don't cost me very much, even so; I got hold of them from the workers who roll cigars in the factories in Riga. Naturally they had stolen them and sold them for what they could get. And I didn't pay duty on them either—as though *I* should pay duty!'

'Why do you make me carry them?'

'No, you can't understand that, can you? Why, simply because I've got to have a servant. If ever you went to Russia, then you'd see for yourself that no one there carries even the smallest bundle himself. He has a servant to do it. And if he has many bundles, then he has two servants.'

'How many boxes of cigars have you got altogether?'

August grandly tosses his head and says: 'There might well be a hundred boxes still left. I sold a thousand or so before you got here.'

'Who did you have for your servant then?'

August started: 'What—my servant? Oh, I just let my customers come to the ship themselves and get their boxes. What made you ask that, anyway?'

Edevart, thoughtfully: 'Oh, I just wanted to ask. But is this the thing that's to make you famous?'

'I decline to answer you,' said August, grandly, taking offence. 'I'm not telling you to-day all the things I have my fingers in. But just the same let me ask you this: have you much more than I have? If so, let me see it!'

'No, I haven't anything.'

'H'm. Then there's no reason why we should sit here and be bad friends.'

'Bad friends?' cried Edevart ruefully. 'Let me tell you this, August, there isn't a person in the world I think more of than you. And I only wish that this whole cargo here was yours to become famous with, that you can believe.'

They talked and talked things over in their peculiar Nordland dialect; naïve and formal it was but it always expressed their meaning. August's good nature returned and he began to boast as before: he said that it was unbelievable, the things he had accomplished on this last voyage of his. 'I arrived in the kingdom of Russia and I went ashore and did what no one else dared to do; you can ask any one in the crew, if you want to.'

Edevart: 'I don't need to ask, I see it all myself. And besides, no one ever saw anything like those gold rings you have on your fingers.'

Again August tossed his head: 'I have many others like these.'

Edevart was given a couple of the rings to try on. Heavy and exotic they were, some shaped like coiled snakes, some set with precious stones; he weighed them in his hand and asked what they were worth. Oh, that August! It was no longer like the time when he was in the fur business and had to part with his dress-coat in order to pay the rent for the eight-oar. One might now well believe that he had been off to India and opened those treasure-chests of his.

'Try this one on!' said August and took a snake-ring from his vest pocket. 'Will it go on? Well, then, that one you may have to keep.'

Edevart didn't believe him. 'I'm to have it to keep, did you say?'

August flared up and pretended to be provoked. 'You

are not to cry out that way every time I give you a gold ring for a gift! It's just as though you couldn't take my word for anything. I say that you're to have this ring. Now go and show it to that Knoff fellow you wrote me about and ask him if he owns anything like it.'

Edevart, overwhelmed: 'I haven't a single word left in my mouth!'

They talked about Knoff. Edevart had raved about him in his letter to Riga and he was therefore unable to criticize him too harshly now, but he no longer refrained from mentioning his weaknesses, his tricks in business, his eccentricities and his general foolishness, especially about the little steamer stop south of him which bothered him so much.

'What about that steamer stop?' asked August.

Edevart reported what God and every man in Fosenland knew: that the regular steamers of the Vadsø-Hamburg line sailed straight past Knoff's important trading station and, just as they had always done, cast anchor off an insignificant place some miles south. It was a senseless situation but Knoff had never been successful in his efforts to have it changed.

August took in the whole situation at once; he had gathered experience from far and wide and was not at a loss to prescribe a remedy for anything; was it far off course to come in to Knoff's place? How deep was the harbour? Was the district well populated and did it extend far inland?

More so than in the case of the old steamer stop which was located simply on a headland, Edevart thought.

'Then Knoff must be a fool!'

'How so?'

August showed definite signs of excitement; he was hatching a scheme: 'You say that at the old steamer stop they have to come ashore in small boats?'

'Ay.'

'And didn't you say just now that Knoff's harbour never freezes?'

'Ay, that's right. It's just like it is in Svolvær.'

August, ponderously: 'In that case he has only to build him a dock.'

'Ay, build him a dock,' said Edevart, not understanding a word of it. 'H'm, is that what he ought to do?'

August was nothing less than astonished at that man Knoff, he really had to laugh at him. Why hadn't he built him a dock long ago? For then the ships would be coming in to him to-day. No one could tell August that a steamer would sail past a regular dock where she could slip in and tie up as snugly as though she were back in her home port. Who could find a ship that would prefer an anchorage in the open sea in all kinds of weather to a quiet haven close to the shore?

Edevart began to see daylight after a little. Oh, that August! 'You certainly are a clever fellow to think of all that!' he declared.

August swelled. 'If only I had my hands on that Knoff!' said he.

'You must come and see him with me!' said Edevart.

'Ay, if I were a sly fox, I'd go up there and buy a strip of land from him and build my own dock and have the ships come to *me*. Then Knoff would have to rent the dock from me, and he'd pay for it through the nose, too, let me tell you. But after I'd drained on him long enough I'd let him buy the dock, I would. I'd do the honourable thing.'

'Now you'll have to come!'

August flared. 'I'm not coming, far from it!' said he. 'And if you want to know what I think about the voyage to Lofoten, I'll tell you that you ought to command the sloop yourself.'

'Who, me?'

'You and nobody else. Think that over! And be thinking at the same time, since that man Knoff is mad at you and won't pay you what's coming to you, as you say, that you needn't go on saving him money even unto the third and fourth generation. You can make that up when you buy your fish.'

'I don't know how to sail a sloop,' said Edevart in a tone of finality.

'That's funny! Didn't I teach you on the *Seagull* and put you right about the compass and charts and reefs and lighthouses and how to use your sails? Do you know, Edevart, I'm actually ashamed of you!'

'Anyway I won't get command of the sloop.'

'No, that may be,' admitted August. 'For you always were dumb when it came to using your head and helping yourself along. You'll never get anywhere. But no matter how things stand *I* won't take the sloop. You can tell that to Knoff for me. For I have other irons in the fire.'

They got rid of several more boxes of cigars up in town; they were together the whole time and August steered clear of foolishness. He said: 'No shore-leave this time, nothing doing. I'm a business man now, it will be too bad if I don't make a fortune out of it!'

A couple of days later he announced that he was leaving for the Levanger Fair and generously invited Edevart to accompany him. They started out early one morning. The weather was murky with a cold fog hanging over the sea. And this was a good thing, August said, for now the revenue officers or coastal police would not be able to see very far! He was very secretive about a little chest he carried under his arm, merely let it be understood that it contained many valuables.

When they arrived in Levanger, August closed the door of their room in the little hotel and stationed himself in the centre of the floor. 'The hour has now struck when I am to lay something before your mortal eyes!'

said he, assuming the air of a prophet. He opened the chest. Oh! Now, where had he got hold of these treasures? Rings, jewel-boxes, necklaces, chains, ear-rings, brooches! Edevart sat there dumbly and stared at all this glory. That August, that August! Of course there was probably no unusual value to any of these pieces of jewellery, but their barbaric glitter struck one's eye at once. August was pale before the greatness of the occasion and from time to time mentioned a large sum in connection with a ring of unusual width or a blue and gold locket set with infinitesimal pearls. Without a shadow of a doubt these trinkets were cheap affairs; the diamonds were imitations at best, but they created none the less a splendid effect. The goods might have been picked up in a pawnshop or some antique store, perhaps some of them had even been stolen from private homes, for all of them were old and had seen good use. August took out a little silver trinket-box engraved and inlaid with black enamel, a fine example of niello-work which must have come from the interior of Russia. He lifted up the lid and withdrew a small gold watch with a blue stone set into the case. 'How would you like to trade this for your watch?' he said as though he were making an undreamed-of and unreasonable joke of such a priceless article. 'This was once the Czarina's own pocket watch,' he said. 'It's a fifty-jewel watch, all rubies, and each wheel is made of gold!'

At length August took from the box a long strip of silken material, with gold threads woven through it; lovely as any dream it was, changing its colour from blue to red and back again in the light and richly fringed at both ends.

Edevart could not understand it at all; he sat in contemplation of a mystery. August must have laid a pretty solid foundation for prosperity during that period when he was in command of Skaaro's sloop and he must also have saved up every penny of the wages he had received

during the past months aboard the bark *Soleglad*. Edevart knew nothing of the value attached to trinkets and jewellery; everything together might be worth a million, so far as he knew, and where had August got hold of that? Edevart felt unhappy.

August perceived very clearly that his comrade was having his own opinion of him, but he was for the moment too high and mighty to make any explanations.

At length Edevart asked: 'Are you selling these for some one?'

August had to answer, was forced to confess: 'How's that? When I sell them it'll be for myself! Now what do you think of that?'

Edevart: 'Oh, well, it's none of my business.'

August, at once disturbed: 'None of your business? Don't you believe this is mine? It is so completely and unquestionably mine that—see here, I'll show you how I'll defend it.' Whereupon August drew from his pocket a revolver and held it up in the air.

'All right,' said Edevart and gave in.

'Ho! None of your business? It's none of anybody's business!' continued August. 'Listen, it's different in Russia than it is here. When there's a fire in Riga it might be that it's only a house where they sell valuables that's burning—ay, but this time three other houses around it were on fire. I and some others helped to put it out and this we did for nothing. But there were many who paid themselves for all that they did—a crowd of villains, tramps and cellar rats who ought to be beaten to death, I can tell you, for they didn't act like Christian people. And then they came to me to buy the stuff; they would not take no for an answer and I had to buy it in order to save my life. That's the way it happened. But they were generous fellows, some of them, and they didn't ask much, hardly anything. I gave them my address in order to get away from them, for I thought that if ever I

got back to Dünamünde they'd let me alone. But sure enough, they found me and one evening they came with some rings and another evening with several silver boxes full of things; they said if I didn't buy the things some one else would buy them and they cried and asked me to save them. What was I to do to get out of it? Why, when they made the sign of the cross and fell on their knees, I had to do them this favour—I didn't have the heart to turn them away. Would you have done that?'

'No,' answered Edevart, won over by his comrade's account. 'I would have done just as you did.'

Later on Edevart thought over this answer of his and decided that it had been hasty and not in accord with his true feelings. Just a year ago he would have shaken his head to himself—now he had learned things from August and others, from Knoff and from everyday life; he had begun to pay so much less attention to the difference between right and wrong. Oh yes, he had grown a little hair on his chest, he could get along and take care of himself. The wonder of Lovisa Margreta still lay in his heart, but it was no longer so overwhelmingly important to him as it had been in the past; it was quite some time ago now since the wonder had been born.

The Levanger Fair was hardly worth mentioning; it took Edevart no time at all to see everything. On the day following the opening he ran across watch-pedlar Papst; both were happy to see each other again,—they met as old friends. Edevart took out his watch and showed it to Papst, showed that he still had it and had taken good care of it; he also repeated what the two jewellers in Bergen had said about it.

Ay, and didn't they become good friends and companions though! They even went so far as to become partners in business as well! Within an hour's time that

good Papst had dressed Edevart up in an overcoat because Edevart was cold in the light coat he was wearing. The overcoat was much too large for him, but what did he care about that? It was nice and warm and had many pockets and in the pockets were bright new silver watches which Edevart was to sell. So; but he was not to say that he was Papst's representative—that would not be necessary.

How could Edevart go selling watches? He received his instructions from the master who delivered them with many a necessary gesture of his raised forefinger. Tests were given and the lad showed no lack of promise. Later on he learned things himself—oh, it was like school for him and work which developed him quickly and without trouble. How well things were turning out! The lad was beginning to rise in the world. He was rising almost to August's level, for here he was now, he too with riches in his hands. He felt highly honoured by Papst's confidence in him and determined to apply himself diligently.

He sold a watch or two to working boys and youngsters of his own age. He would begin by demanding an exorbitant amount and then come down in price; this was a profitable way of doing business and was lots of fun, excellent entertainment. He learned to call out his wares and bring their value to the attention of his customers. But the most exciting thing of all was to substitute one watch for another by means of his many pockets—he would bring them out, let them disappear and bring them out again until at last he had sold the first of the three or four watches he had exhibited—the principal trick of the master. Ho! This was first and last to cast glamour over the whole procedure and he had to laugh to himself.

That evening, when he had returned home and rendered an account of his sales, Papst nodded and put the money away in a bulky pocketbook; Edevart had done

well, the master said, as well as could be expected. 'Five watches the first day, that's not so bad. Go out again to-morrow!'

The following day he sold at least as many again. Ay, he was learning his trade. But it wasn't long before he began to get tired of selling watches. In the course of the day he revealed his inexperience: he let a watch go for rock-bottom price to a young lad who stood collarless and cold and counted his pennies and found them a dollar short of the regular price. A thrill ran through the young watch-pedlar when the boy seized his hand to thank him.

Now the Lord be praised for innocence! Everything comes from the earth save innocence, for that alone is sent from Heaven!

And Edevart was bewildered to discover that even this sale, which had been a gesture of tender-heartedness, later reacted to his own advantage; he profited by it, for the enraptured youngster had been unable to keep still about his purchase. On the contrary, he told everyone he met and that brought new customers to Edevart and, although he was more careful about lowering prices, he was sold out by noon. He had gained the reputation of offering unusual bargains. Where had he got hold of his merchandise? God knows if he hadn't stolen it! None the less, or rather so much the better, customers were taking advantage of the situation.

During the afternoon Edevart went out again with a fresh supply of watches in his pockets. He wandered slowly about, moved from one place to another and sold one watch here, another there. He ran across August who was likewise engaged in business. August was a Russian, too, and uttered amazing words as he cautiously offered trinkets for sale. He had among his followers men as well as women, but mostly women. His business seemed to be going very well; he was fairly resourceful in spite of his

difficulty with the language. Edevart heard him telling that this particular finger ring had magic powers and that this pair of ear-rings had been found during an earthquake, whereas this particular buckle set with sapphires had once been part of a martyr's crown. He was filled with fantasy and if a few of his audience laughed and shook their heads, the most of them pardoned him because he was unable to speak Norwegian more fluently.

He held up that lovely piece of silk cloth interwoven with gold threads and showed it to a lady who was wearing a hat and explained that in his country, Russia, it had been the bridal veil of some Princess. The lady answered smilingly that she would not use it over her face, but she bought the piece of silk.

Along toward evening the youngster whom Edevart had befriended returned to him; there he stood collarless and tired, with a hurt look in his eyes. That watch of his had stopped and wouldn't go again. It was as though Edevart had been struck a blow; he was filled with grave misgivings in regard to these cheap watches; perhaps they were not to be depended upon. 'Did it stop just now?' he asked the lad. No, it had stopped a long time ago; he had taken it to a jeweller. 'What did the jeweller say?' The lad hesitated, embarrassed over the answer and Edevart asked no more questions. He shook the watch. No! He tried winding it a little more. No. Edevart's head reeled. He could give the lad another watch—among the unsold watches returned to him, Papst would never notice that there was one that had stopped. It was a case of the apprentice cheating his master. Why not?

'You may have another watch,' said he to the lad.

'Ay, thanks. And will it go and keep time?'

Edevart was touched; he revealed his inexperience. 'You may have another watch or your money back, whichever you want,' said he.

The youngster, beaming: 'Can I? Oh, thanks!' And the lad was in doubt as to which he should take.

Edevart undertook to advise him and said: 'I haven't much faith in these watches myself, and if I were in your place I'd rather have my money back. That's just how I think about it.'

The lad took the money, thanked Edevart and went his way, relieved.

But as Edevart was on his way home two other lads stood waiting for him and threatened to give him a good beating on account of the watches he had sold them: they had taken them to a jeweller and had learned that they were hardly worth a dollar apiece whereas they had paid Edevart three! Edevart could not afford to take a beating now when his pockets were full of watches and he asked: 'Did your watches stop?' No, not quite stopped, but they weren't worth the money! With that Edevart left them. They followed right on his heels and bawled nasty remarks at him all the way, but they did no harm to him.

Something must surely be wrong with those watches! When he had reckoned up his day's sales with Papst he let it be understood that on the following day—the last day of the fair—he would have other things to attend to.

'No, why that?' asked Papst. Now things were going well and the last day of the fair would be the best day of all.

Edevart pretended that he had to help his partner with something.

'I have seen that partner of yours!' said Papst. 'Keep away from him, for he is selling stolen goods. Listen to me now, you won't go away and leave me with these watches on my hands?'

'Ay, of course I will,' said Edevart emphatically.

Papst was downright crushed: it was almost impossible to bear such disappointment. He reminded Edevart how he had as much as given him that expensive watch he was

now carrying in his pocket and now all he was doing was timidly asking a favour in return.

Edevart had now grown even more hair on his chest and he said: 'I've already sold twenty-five or thirty watches for you, maybe more, but I'll say nothing of that. But what kind of watches are these I'm supposed to sell?'

'Cheap watches—well, cheap prices, too.'

'Are these cases made of silver?'

'I don't know,' answered Papst. 'It looks like silver.'

Edevart: 'I don't know either; but to-day a man came to me who had scraped the back of his watch and said that it was brass underneath.'

Papst threw up both his hands: '*Hja*, they are cheap watches. Cheap prices, too.'

'Why don't you sell these watches yourself instead of getting other folk to sell them for you?'

'I thought that you would be willing to do me that favour yourself.'

'Ay,' said Edevart. 'But here I'm going out among folk and making bad friends with them. They follow after me and threaten to beat me.'

'Ho-ho! You're a strong lad!' laughed Papst. 'Besides, you'll never be coming back here to Levanger. But *I* will! Old Papst must keep wandering around from place to place and always come back to them all! Oh, well . . .'

Ay, naturally Edevart ought to have shown more gratitude toward the friendly old Jew and worked for him another day. But he simply could not bring himself to that. And for all that, they did not part enemies. On the contrary, Papst patted him on the shoulder and said: 'We'll likely enough meet again!' Edevart was offered no pay for the work he had performed and he expected none. He gave back the heavy overcoat and sauntered light-heartedly back to the hotel.

August had returned home dissatisfied. His remarks were bitter. 'You can't make any money here,' he said.

'No matter what price you offer your goods for at first, you've got to come down till your profit's gone! What kind of folk come here, anyway? Peasants from Værdø, the whole lot of them! They're not ashamed to offer a man the meanest of prices! Levanger!' he raged. 'Did you ever set foot in such a miserable rat-hole! To-morrow I'll try selling for what I can get and then I'll pull out of here!'

'Did you sell the Czarina's pocket watch?' asked Edevart.

'Ho! did I sell the Czarina's pocket watch? What do you think I could get for it here in this miserable little town!'

'Will the watch go?'

'Naturally, it'll go. What do you ask that for?'

'You can sell it in Trondhjem,' said Edevart.

'Ay, and get myself pinched on the spot!'

Everything seemed dark indeed for August; he was displeased and irritable. Here he had come to the market town of Levanger with its five hundred inhabitants expecting to conduct an extensive business in jewellery and trinkets, and what was the result? He had been disappointed! Not that he was particularly crestfallen over that, he had made some money on his golden ornaments; but what annoyed him and angered him most, was the general adversity he encountered, for now in any case his chance of becoming famous was ruined.

In the morning he counted all his treasures and evaluated them according to Levanger prices, mumbling as he did so figures which were shamefully small. Edevart bought for cash a little gold locket which could be worn on a chain; it was nothing much to speak of and August preferred to give it to him for nothing, but Edevart forced him to accept the price he had decided to charge for it.

Edevart remained in his room; he sat there and was bored. He had a feeling that he must by no means show himself too much in the street and be recognized and per-

haps followed once again; on the other hand he had nothing to occupy him in his room—to think and worry over things was futile and reading bored him as much as anything else now. August came home for dinner and as soon as he had left again, Edevart himself went out—he had enough courage for it now, for the days were short and it was already twilight.

August was nowhere to be seen, but there was old Papst wandering along a short distance away. He spoke a familiar word or two to everyone he met and now and then he took a watch from his pocket and showed it to a possible customer. Edevart knew by heart every gesture of his hand and he could almost guess the words he was uttering.

Suddenly August appeared coming out of a house. Was he drunk? Not at all. But he was in a gay, triumphant mood. 'I have begun going directly from house to house,' said he. 'I ought to have done that in the first place. I have even been to the goldsmith's and sold him a couple of my smaller things—he couldn't afford much of anything. Now I am coming from the druggist's. I sold him the gold watch.'

'What!'

August nodded: 'And got a high price. It was none other than the same lady who bought the bridal veil, the druggist's wife. She would not believe that it had belonged to the Czarina of Russia, but I made the sign of the Cross in front of my eyes and then she sent for the druggist. "Ay," says the druggist. "If you want it, then you may have it!" Oh, Edevart, things are beginning to pick up! Now I'm going to another place. There are lots of army officers in the town; a rich captain is to be stationed here. What do these lads want with you?'

A couple of youngsters had spoken to Edevart, excited customers of the previous day, who were complaining that they had been cheated—their watches were worth nothing.

They had looked into the matter and they wanted the fraud made good; come on with the money!

But Edevart no longer had his pockets filled with watches which he had to protect; he motioned away the most insistent of the lads and asked to be left in peace. What did he have to do with Papst's bad watches anyway? He had been his employé and had sold his goods, perhaps worthless goods, but what of it? A deal was a deal. No one else was thin-skinned, so why should Edevart be!

They walked down the street the whole time arguing; the lads called out to whomever they met that here was the one who had sold them brass watches instead of silver ones as he said they were, and now he would get it! They caught up with Papst and the lads explained to him as well that they had been cheated by this fellow here who had gone about selling watches during the last few days; they pointed to Edevart, stuck their fingers right on his chest and said that here he stood!

Papst sorrowfully shook his head over such a wicked world as this he had to live in and gave himself over to peaceful meditation. 'Let the young man go his way,' said he. 'Don't keep him here any longer, just tell him to go away. Just go to the jeweller's and let him fix your watches; it won't cost you very much and then you will have your watches!'

'Ay, but they are brand-new watches,' they cried. 'Are we to have brand-new watches repaired? We never heard of such a thing. They stopped almost as soon as we had paid for them; they probably went in the first place only because he was shaking them.'

Yes, Papst was overwhelmed, but he continued to conciliate the boys. The last Edevart heard was the following pious speech from Papst: 'You mustn't buy watches from any one who comes along; you must always buy from Papst. He doesn't cheat!'

Edevart went home to his hotel and didn't go out again. He had had enough! He had had another look over a fence: there was no great mirror this time and no golden things to see. Merely a world where cheating goes on in the dark.

August returned home after his tasks of the day were over. He was not entirely sold out, but he had left his chest somewhere or other and he now carried his entire shop in his pockets. 'I had to throw the chest away,' said he. 'I got myself into a scrape. This is the worst rat-hole of a place in the world. God knows I wish I were far away from it! Let's move on, Edevart, this very night, if we can.'

'We can't be leaving to-night.'

August told his story: 'I sold a couple of expensive things to the Captain; he lives outside the town, a long way out, and I raced as fast as I could to get back. On the way in I passed a big house and without thinking, I called at the door there as well. It was the school. What did I want in the school! The teacher came to the door and asked what I wanted. I was a Russian and had things for sale—something, *nitchevo*, or whatever it was I called it. He barely glanced into the chest, for no school-teacher like him ever has a penny to his name. "Well, well, so you are a Russian!" says he. "That's fine. Be so good as to come in and sit down. I learned some Russian when I was a school-director in Hammerfest!" And then he began to talk Russian to me. The Devil and all was loose then! I nodded and smiled and made the sign of the Cross, but he asked me questions about things that had to have answers to them and I said *Hoberpomere* a couple of times and twisted a few other words, too. He couldn't understand this and shook his head. Now, of course I had my revolver, but I didn't have the heart to shoot a man merely because he could speak Russian! And so I got raving mad and slammed down the lid of the chest and got out of the

place in a hurry. But after I saw how I had left him standing there with a mean look on his face, I was afraid he might play me a dirty trick and tell on me. I don't even feel safe sitting here where I am.'

'What did you do with the chest?' asked Edevart.

August: 'Oh, I took the stuff out of the chest and put it in my pockets while I was running through the streets; I threw the chest away so as not to be recognized by it later on. Oh, you can believe that I know what I'm doing! But the trouble was that I didn't decide to be a Malay or a Siamese, for I know how to be everything. Well, but you don't think we can get away to-night?'

'No,' said Edevart. 'But anyway you didn't do anything wrong, or did you?'

August: 'Anything wrong! Why should I do wrong? I didn't even take out my revolver once!' But August felt very unsafe; he had not eaten anything and would like to have had some supper. But he didn't dare take a chance; he went to bed hungry.

They arrived back in Trondhjem safe and sound and August seemed a bit easier in his mind. And he had good reason for feeling bright and happy, too, for his pocket-book was pleasingly fat—he had done pretty well at the fair after all. What was the matter then? 'I didn't come out as well as I had hoped,' said he.

Oh, well, so it was nothing so very unusual after all. August had made no fortune; he had nothing to boast about this time. Edevart was more easily contented and felt that things were good enough just as they stood. August pooh-poohed this idea—his mind was constructed on a larger scale: he had to make one more *coup* and get out of it with a hundred times as much. After all what did the little he had amount to? A trifle for clothes, a trifle for board and lodging over one winter, nothing at all. And here's that woman to whom Edevart had taken the

dozen boxes of cigars, she was absolutely unable to pay for them even now. That made twelve boxes, a total loss to him. Well, well, the woman would have paid him if she had been able to, of course, but . . .

'No,' said August importantly. 'I'll have to make one big haul!'

'Ay, you must go north with me,' said Edevart.

August, after pausing a moment open-mouthed: 'How you can manage to think such a thought! I, who have been around the world! Besides, I'm not discharged from the bark and she is all ready to make another voyage to Riga.'

'H'm, so you're going along again?'

'I'm going along again, I've thought it all out. Oh, it'll turn out differently this time! I'll buy up more things than before and come back with a regular cargo; I'll charter a vessel of my own. Did you ever hear of anything to beat that? Marvellous!' And August swaggered lustily and fairly beamed with pride.

Edevart: 'But how will you make out with it? You've had trouble enough to get rid of what you had this time, haven't you?'

'Get rid of it? Never mind about that! I'll go off to another fair.'

After a bit, Edevart said: 'Well, I only hope you won't come to regret it!'

His gentle words simply irritated August. What did this youngster know about things anyway. August pretended to be disgusted and turned away from him as though it would be cruel to set him right and sow doubt in his mind so early in his life.

The two comrades stayed together a day or two longer while the bark lay at anchor taking on dried fish and various pieces of package freight; they went about the city and sold what remained of the trinkets. Neither of them went in for heavy entertainment; they behaved themselves quietly enough and even visited a few churches

and museums; they toured the city thoroughly and kept their eyes open. While they were down wandering about the harbour, August was in a position to point out certain characteristics of this or that pier shed—Knoff from Fosenland ought to have been here and heard him expressing himself on the various types of piers and wharves.

No, August was not cutting loose now. When he had a wallet filled with bank-notes he steered clear of the follies of shore-leave. It was at odd times when he had little or nothing in his pocket that he spent his wages for a good time and suffered while he was getting over it. Wages were never intended to last more than a day and were not worth worrying over—let the money go! A wallet was quite another thing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE two lads parted company and Edevart returned to Fosenland; something drew him there; perhaps it was the bag of clothes he had left behind.

But Lord of Heaven, he had forgotten something in Trondhjem! Look, now, hadn't he given away to strangers those presents he had brought from Bergen to take to his people back home? There was that lovely shawl for his mother, the little pair of shoes and various other articles for his brothers and sisters—all these he had dealt out to the family at Doppen. During all this time he had not once written home and not a penny had he sent to his father. In Trondhjem he might have made up for all this by sending home a package or perhaps even a good-sized box. But he had forgotten it, had thought of it once or twice perhaps, but each time had put it off until at last he had forgotten it altogether. He groaned inwardly whenever he thought of it now; it was shameless and sinful of him; there they were back home, for a certainty expecting a letter from him, his father, quiet, thoughtful and subdued, his mother patient and worshipful, gentle in her thoughts. 'Perhaps to-day there will be a letter!' His brother Joakim will have been confirmed by now, a big lad who has shot up like a bean-stalk and outgrown all his clothes—ay, Joakim would be thankful to the depths of his soul for a new suit.

At the trading station they asked him if he had come back to stay. No, not that he knew of; he had simply come back after his clothes. He stayed over Sunday and

Monday. Knoff came to him and said: 'H'm, are you back again?' Ay, that he was, answered Edevart. And that was all they said. Knoff walked away, mighty and important.

The cooper reported to Edevart that Haakon Doppen had visited the store and made some purchases, and that he hadn't appeared greatly changed. They had asked him to play his accordion for them, but he had begged off from that and told them that he was all through with that sort of thing. But after they had made him take a drink and given him some coffee he played for a dance in the servants' quarters. That was hard for him but they encouraged him and said: 'You haven't forgotten any of your old tricks, have you.' And he had stayed all night.

Edevart asked if his wife had been along—Lovisa Margreta. No, she hadn't. But they would both be here at Christmas time.

Tuesday passed. Edevart managed at last to write a letter home and enclose some money. This eased his mind and made him cheerful again; in this happy frame of mind he promised himself that he would go home with gifts for them all before long.

Knoff approached him again and said: 'What are you hanging around for? Why don't you get to work?'

'I'm in no hurry,' answered Edevart.

Knoff, amazed: 'Trying to be a swell, eh?'

'Oh, no, not exactly that, but—'

'Yes!' said Knoff curtly. 'He who worketh not shall not deserve to eat!'

Edevart frowned: 'I'm not eating your food.'

'H'm. Whose food are you eating, then?'

'I'm living with the cooper and I'm paying my board.'

Knoff was silent for some time; he wanted to smooth things out. At length he said: 'Well, well, that wasn't what I meant! Where have you been all this time? H'm, in Trondhjem and at the Levanger Fair. No, that was by no means what I meant. You may stay on here just as

before. And if you care to be one of the sloop's crew on the Lofoten voyage, I have a place for you with regular able-seaman's pay. What I wanted to say was this: did you leave the ship at the usual landing place? Is there a spark of life left in the people down there?'

'So far as I could see.'

'Yes, but if you had asked for work down there, they wouldn't have had anything for you to do.'

'I wasn't interested in that. I was on my way here to get those clothes of mine.'

Knoff mumbled something to himself; his mind was still obsessed by that one idea: why that decrepit old steamer stop didn't tumble down into the sea!

Here was the opportunity Edevart had been waiting for, and experience had taught him to make the most of a situation. He said: 'Why isn't the steamer stop here at your place?'

Knoff wagged his head and answered almost piteously: 'I can't get the ships to come in here.'

'That's funny. Then it's your own fault.'

'What's that you're saying? You don't know what you're talking about!'

'I know what you ought to do.'

Knoff stared at the lad coldly: 'Just as though I haven't done all there was to be done!'

'You ought to build you a dock,' said Edevart.

A minute of complete silence passed. Knoff had been going to put his hand in his pocket after something or other but paused with his hand half raised; he acted as though he had been struck a blow. 'Ought I?' he said.

'Then the ships would come to you.'

'Dock?' said Knoff. 'Do you think so? A dock, build a dock, eh?'

Edevart had the advantage now and was going to make the best of it. 'I must say that I'm surprised you never thought of it,' said he.

'I have thought of it — many times — however, how can I be sure that — I mean —'

Edevart explained: No distance inland to speak of, channel deep enough for any ship, ice-free harbour. Here was a busy place in the centre of a good big district; the old landing place lay on the tip of a long point of land and was far removed from folk. Build a dock here and Edevart would like to see the ship which would not prefer to slip in between its protecting walls and lie there as snugly as though she were indoors rather than lie rocking out in the open sea and send her passengers and freight ashore in boats!

'Come on down with me,' said Knoff. 'I'm of a mind to show you . . .'

They went down to the water front and looked about; the dock must be built there by the outer warehouse—it was deep enough there,—small cargo boats had frequently sailed right up to that very warehouse with flour and salt.

And now Knoff began to take the lead again; he pointed and said: 'Here is where I've always thought the dock ought to be, if ever I happened to build one.'

Edevart was clever enough to let this remark pass without attempting to reply to it. On the way back to the house he had the satisfaction of noticing that Knoff was very friendly to him and regarded him through entirely different eyes. Edevart then began to put on airs by directing the conversation into a discussion of construction and use of materials—he pointed out certain common and individual characteristics of the various types of wharfing, ay, that there were many kinds of docks, that one could build of wood or of stone—

'Stone!' said Knoff. 'Stone is more durable!'

'But it is also more expensive.'

Knoff threw out his hand impatiently. 'As I said before, stone is more durable! Listen to me now; if you want a place on the sloop, I can pay you regular seaman's

wages starting from to-day. And you must move away from the cooper's place—I want my own people to live with me. It won't be long until Christmas and as soon as Christmas and the New Year are over, it won't be any time before you'll be sailing. Is it a bargain?'

'Ay,' said Edevart.

Oh, things had turned out just as he had expected: he was to stay on here for good! And what did he want here? Nothing, just to live and breathe here—again he was afflicted by tender memories, it seemed!

He was given all kinds of work to do, whatever happened to turn up, and it didn't make any particular difference if at times he did nothing. When the Christmas business commenced, he was summoned to help out in the main store; he was no great hand at writing, but he was a demon when it came to figuring things out in his head, exactly what they needed. Besides, he had pleasant ways with folk, was well dressed and wore, not only a plain gold ring, but also a triple-banded snake-ring, so of course he deserved his promotion. He now took his meals with the other store folk in the large dining-room together with the Chief himself and his family.

This was for him quite some step upward in the world and it produced a great effect upon him.

And then one day Lovisa Margreta came. She had her husband with her. They were afoot and had come the long and difficult way over almost impassable roads; Lovisa Margreta had snow all over her legs and dress. It was so strange to see her with many clothes on! She looked like a stranger, without her usual childish sweetness and Edevart stared at her and bowed, as he did to the other customers, before he recognized her. He took a good look at her husband; he too looked like a stranger. He didn't greatly resemble the portrait which hung in the house at Doppen, but he was good looking enough, nothing wrong with him, and he had curly hair.

'Is it you I'm seeing again!' said Lovisa Margreta. She spoke naturally and without hesitation to Edevart and it was *her* voice he heard! But here she was wearing a scarf about her head and woolen mittens on her hands and, in addition to all these clothes, this mass of clothes and on top of everything, the shawl, the 'vamp,' which he himself had given her.

'Who is he?' asked her husband. And when Lovisa Margreta had told him, he turned darkly to Edevart with the following words: 'H'm, it was you who were working back home on my place! What did you get for it?'

'Get?'

'I asked you what you got for it.'

'Board,' answered Edevart.

Lovisa Margreta: 'Ay, he got his food.'

Haakon asked: 'Food—just food?'

Edevart held back no longer. 'I didn't expect more than that,' said he. 'I was a vagabond at that time and I was glad to get food for the work I did.'

Haakon could not reply to this. At length he turned to his wife and asked in a downright joking tone of voice, but harshly: 'Did he get any work done, this fellow? He looks like a dude to me!'

'Be good now!' cautioned his wife softly.

They bought goods and put them away in their sacks, chatting casually with Edevart as they did so. Edevart asked after the children and received an answer to his question. Haakon began to recognize acquaintances among the other customers and fell into conversation with them; Edevart and Lovisa Margreta wandered back and forth the length of the counter in picking out the various goods she needed. They finally brought up at the further end of the store and found themselves alone together, but they talked simply about the goods and didn't exchange a single secret word. Oh, where was the glory now? Had

they both forgotten what they had been to each other? . . . At length Edevart said: 'Is everything going well with you?'

She cast a quick glance behind her and answered: 'He isn't there any more, he's gone out. Yes, thanks, everything's going well.'

'How does he take it now that I'm still around?'

She: 'I suppose I'll have to see where he's gone—'

'No,' said Edevart. 'Listen, Lovisa Margreta, I've waited so long to see you.'

She gently shook her head and made no answer.

'I've a little something here in my pocket I want to give you.'

'I suppose you've heard a lot about him?' she asked.

'Yes,' answered Edevart.

'Ay, but he was pardoned,' said she eagerly. 'He behaved himself so well that they cut a whole year from his sentence, wasn't that a lot?'

'Of course,' mumbled Edevart absently.

'If only he doesn't get anything to drink now!' said she uneasily.

Edevart: 'Wasn't that a girl he was standing and talking with? The one with red hair. She won't be giving him anything?'

'Ay,' said Lovisa Margreta. 'I know her. She isn't the best one for him to be with.'

'Let them be!' Edevart fumbled in his pocket and began: 'I have here a little thing—'

'No, you mustn't give me anything,' she answered. 'I don't dare take it. Wait a moment, I'll have to look for them. I'll be back at once.'

Edevart followed her with his eyes all the way down to the door. He didn't cry out, didn't make much ado, but where was the glory now? This harsh treatment had come quite unexpectedly; it was a hard and cruel experience

and had reduced him from some one to no one. He pulled out a drawer under the counter, sank down on the edge of it and remained sitting.

When she came in again, she said with relief: 'No, he was only with some of his comrades. Let me see a string of pearls—or maybe only a silk ribbon. I promised my little girl to bring her something.'

Edevart got up and brought out one thing after another; he was absent-minded, hardly knew what he was doing and spoke to her only when it came to mentioning the prices. When it was time for her to pay, she had to go out and call in her husband. She returned with him just as though nothing had happened, although he certainly must have had quite a bit to drink.

To begin with, Haakon was in high spirits and good-natured toward his wife. 'Ay, here you are all ready to go,' said he. 'But I still have all my things to buy. Let me see some pipes.'

Edevart brought out some pipes, many pipes—there were pipes to choose from.

Haakon said: 'No offence, Comrade, you surely haven't done anything wrong. Or have you?'

Edevart remained silent.

'Pick out a pipe now!' said Lovisa Margreta.

'This is all junk,' answered Haakon. 'You pick one out for me!'

'This one!' said she and pointed.

'Well, all right if you say so!' And to Edevart: 'Ay, if you cut it down to a reasonable price, I'll take this pipe. Now a package of smoking tobacco,—Virginia. Then you'll be rid of me. You'll be glad of that, too, won't you?'

Edevart remained silent.

'Well, you can at least tell me how much I owe you for all this, can't you?'

Edevart mentioned the amount.

'H'm, you knew that all right! But you don't sound as though you knew very much, you can't even talk. Was he as dumb as this when he was up home there, Lovisa Margreta?'

'Be good now!' she begged him gently.

'Good? Why does he stand there and not answer my questions? He's done work for me up home, hasn't he?'

'No, pay now,' she pleaded urgently. 'We'll have to be on our way home!'

He was slow about paying; many were the things to be accounted for, any number of small items he had purchased. Edevart had it all in his head, but he had to figure it out several times for the benefit of this half-drunken man. And right in the middle of the addition Haakon might say: 'But I don't suppose you've done anything wrong, eh?'

Edevart turned away from him to wait on another customer.

When the store had closed for the evening, Edevart happened to be passing the servants' quarters and there he heard accordion music and the sounds of a dance going on within; he also saw Lovisa Margreta standing in the doorway. So the people from Doppen hadn't gone home yet? Edevart was not going to stop—he felt so empty, so sterile; there was nothing left to talk about with Lovisa Margreta.

She followed him and said: 'We're staying over till tomorrow; he's promised to play all evening. Oh, well, it doesn't matter, our neighbour-woman is staying with the children. What was that you told me? That you had something for me? Ay, but I'm afraid to take it. You're all too kind to me, but I don't dare. What was it you were going to give me? I suppose you won't tell me now, but I imagined it was your picture—'

'And you wouldn't take that?'

'Of course, but you see—'

'It wasn't my picture,' said Edevart. 'I haven't got any pictures of myself.'

'H'm. Ay, the Lord only knows how nice you've been to me!'

'I've been so much in love with you,' he heard himself say.

She shook her head mournfully and made no reply.

He: 'Have you forgotten altogether how you gave in to me and everything? Have you forgotten that?'

'I don't dare stay here any longer,' she whispered and looked fearfully about her.

'And don't you remember what you said the morning after?'

'What was that?'

'You said that you would like for me to stay on with you even longer.'

She sighed: 'Ay, but he was coming home, you see. We couldn't keep on. No; but now I must go.'

'All right,' said Edevart, heart-broken. 'You can go to that husband of yours!'

She started. 'He's not so wild as you may think, Edevart,' said she. 'You should have answered him and talked with him. You didn't take him in the right way.'

Edevart, pale as a ghost and furious: 'I don't give a damn about talking to him in the right way, as you say. Just let me get my hands on him!'

'No, no, no, Edevart! You want to look out for him, do you hear? I'm so afraid!'

'Ha-ha! Of course! I know very well that he uses a knife—'

'Oh, but that was when he was drunk,' she said to excuse him. 'And you must remember that he did it for my sake. Did you hear that? He didn't mean to take life, and that's what the man who died said, too; he said that he had driven Haakon to it and that God could be his witness.'

Edevart, still terribly angry: 'I don't want to stand

here simply talking about him. I think more of this shoe of mine than I do of him. And you can tell him that from me!'

'Edevart, be as nice to me this time as you've always been!' begged Lovisa Margreta, laying her hand on his arm. 'It won't be long before you'll be finding yourself a sweetheart and then you'll stop thinking about me— There he is!' she whispered, terrified, and went like a streak toward the door of the servants' hall.

Haakon came to meet her and asked her who it was she had stood talking with; Edevart did not hear her reply, but in the light which came from the lamp in the entry-way, he saw Haakon tear himself away from her and come in his direction.

Short was the bout which followed; they wasted no words but came at each other like madmen and it was Edevart's unbridled temper that decided matters: not even a struggle was necessary, merely that little trick with his foot—'the crowfoot'—and a crack under the ear with that heavy young fist, these were all that were needed— Haakon lay curled up in the snow.

Lovisa Margreta alarmed the dancers inside the building; they came running out and surrounded the pair. But they came too late and missed the entertainment. They didn't look kindly at Edevart: this stranger from Nordland had risen too rapidly from general helper about the place to the position of clerk in the store and now he had licked their musician and with that spoiled their fun. They muttered threats and took sides with Haakon; after all, he was one of their number and not a newcomer in their midst. They all began to get in Edevart's way, but that was nothing; he merely stood there and didn't budge an inch. One young man from the village came a bit too near and had to be cautioned back.

Naturally, they had all been drinking together; Haakon Doppen had been drinking and was a bit shaky

on his legs—if it hadn't been for that, he would most certainly have made a better showing. As he got up he laughed, bewildered and embarrassed. Lovisa Margreta brushed the snow from his clothes.

'We're not quits with this!' he threatened, turning to Edevart. Those few minutes in the snow had sobered him and steadied him and he began to swing his arms. Lovisa Margreta screamed and several of his friends tried to restrain him. Uproar and confusion followed. Edevart uttered no word, just stood his ground.

Suddenly a voice: 'What's this!'

It was Knoff. He looked from one to the other.

'It isn't anything,' answered some one.

But others there were who felt it was wisest to tell the Chief the whole truth of the matter, since it was he who had raised this stranger from the dust and no doubt had some control over him. 'It's only Haakon Doppen and his nonsense again, it's nothing worse than that.'

Knoff glanced at Haakon and said: 'If you want to stay over till to-morrow, get yourself together and go on to bed!'

'I can just as well go home to-night!' answered Haakon insolently.

'As you like!' said Knoff and walked away.

However, such was the respect the Master commanded, his words were taken as orders and obeyed. They dragged Haakon off to bed and peace lay over the community.

For a long time Edevart wandered about in the moonlight. After all that had happened to him, it would have been much better for him if he had had the brains to go to bed himself. But there were still lights in the houses here and there and the light in the little house especially reserved for visitors was still burning. And what if there was a light there still? Nothing, only that it wasn't yet very late and that he still had hopes of catching a glimpse of Lovisa Margreta and getting her to come out and chat

with him just once more. How wretchedly fettered he felt! Naturally Lovisa Margreta is with her husband in the little house and won't come out. And if she should come out, when then? Could he expect to see ecstasy shining out of her eyes simply because he had tamed her husband? No, she wouldn't even appreciate what he had done; all his bravery had been wasted.

No, he was nothing to her any more. August would have said to her: 'Happy journey to you!' and been indifferent. Edevart, on the other hand, became soft and sentimental; he felt sorry for himself and grieved. Thus weakened after his strenuous excitement, he fell to worrying over whether Lovisa Margreta had a fire in her stove. He saw no smoke coming from the chimney of the house where she was sleeping, and here she had been wading in snow up to her knees and was probably anxious to dry her clothes!

'Good night!' thought he and moved along.

He decided to take a walk down to the water front just to pass the time. What was he doing so far from home, anyway? He might have stayed home in Polden, rowing to Lofoten to spend the winter fishing with his fellow villagers, and going to Vesteraalen after coal fish in the summer; he could have gone on some trawler or other after herring, or line-fishing up in Finmark—oh, many were the things he might have done and lived his life in peace. And then he might have married little Ragna and taken over the family home from his parents, bred his few animals and planted his potatoes and grain like any other farmer—ay, and never found it necessary to go wandering about on a winter night such as this, his heart wailing with secret love pains.

He walked on and was so forlorn that he felt homesick; he wanted to go home again. The village was poor, but in summer it was as bright and friendly as the endless northern day, and in winter there were fantastic tales and

nymphs and water-sprites to think about. Never was there such a place! You need remember only this: how prettily Ragna opened her mouth when she laughed when she was a little girl, and all the while she was growing up. And up home all the children, when it came to that, were pretty when they laughed. And if he should care to turn his thoughts to grander things, was there any place in the world where the mountains were so pretty as they were up home? As early as March the starling was to be seen, and not long afterwards the wild goose. Oh, God, that wonderful ploughshare of wings and crying birds moving along between heaven and earth, beneath which he removed his cap and stood in silence as his father and mother had taught him to do! Oh, yes; he wanted to go home again and he would go home. He would sail north aboard Knoff's sloop and turn toward home from Lofoten—that would be in a month or so. And then the hare and the ptarmigan in the forest would be beginning to turn brown, the brooks moving along under the ice like the pulse of the living earth, and the willows would be beginning to bud.

But what kind of birds were those that used to flutter about the houses and which he could not remember having seen down here in the south? Mere grey and yellow nothings, so laughably small they were! He felt the greatest sympathy for these creatures, for it was unbelievable how much they had to suffer from hunger during the winter. Edevart felt that his eyes were moist as he walked on and, harshly and angrily, he said to himself: 'They were simply common, everyday birds and it's all the same to me if there aren't any of them left up home. They were brown sparrows and grey sparrows, just junk as far as birds go, do you hear!'

He sharply cleared his throat and was forced to break into a bit of some song or other to save himself.

'Are you out singing as late as this?' a voice asked.

He had arrived back in the vicinity of the buildings

and had stumbled upon Jomfru Ellingsen, the housekeeper, who was standing by the corner of the servants' quarters. A shudder ran through him; she was wearing a fur coat and appeared to have been out quite some time. Was she going about spying on some one, and had she discovered what was keeping him out?

'Ay, I'm out for a walk and singing,' he replied. 'I just happened to be wondering if both the warehouse doors were closed and so I went down to see. You're out pretty late yourself!'

'Yes, just to get some fresh air. I have to stay indoors all day long.'

He was on the point of passing on.

'There was quite a rumpus here a while ago,' said she. 'You had it in for that Haakon Doppen?'

'Oh, that was nothing.'

'A fine nothing that happened to be, God bless me if it was! You're quite a lad to have turned such a trick!'

'He was drunk and foolish,' said Edevart disdainfully, but inwardly puffed up over the housekeeper's praise. Here then was one who appreciated him. This Jomfru Ellingsen wasn't so bad after all, young and well set-up, in charge of a large house throughout the day and with maids under her. Pretty? Her form was attractive and she carried it well, her eyes were brown and her breast was high. And now it turned out that she had taken the trouble to sprinkle herself with some kind of marvellous perfume which Edevart breathed into his lungs as he stood there.

'You want to look out for him,' said she. 'I suppose you know what he has done?'

'Ay,' he answered indifferently. 'But he isn't dangerous,' he added grandly.

Jomfru Ellingsen: 'Do you know that wife of his?'

'H'm, no—ay, I worked for her one time last autumn. She was so in need of help.'

'Did you like her?'

There was no doubt about it, Jomfru Ellingsen smelled a mouse; she had probably followed on his heels, had overheard his conversation with Lovisa Margreta, perhaps had even watched the fight from one of the windows.

'Did I like her, did you say?' said he. 'I'm sorry for that woman. But for all of that, she doesn't complain, she hasn't a single bad word for that husband of hers.'

'Don't stand there freezing any longer!' said the Jomfru. 'Look here, let me—!' She tried to put her fur collar around him, but he laughingly pushed it away. She then wanted him to go into the house and seemed very anxious to take care of him. 'Go inside now and go to bed,' said she. 'I'll go with you to the door!' And at the door said she, said Jomfru Ellingsen, that naughty little Devil of a girl: 'Good night! You won't ask me to come in?'

He stared at her with open mouth: 'What—?'

'Ha, ha, ha!' she laughed and was gone.

Toward morning Edevart was awakened by some one throwing snow against his window. Both he and his bedfellow, the baker, sprang out of bed and looked out, but no one was to be seen outside. The moon had set behind the mountain peaks and as yet there was no daylight to speak of. Edevart threw on some clothes and rushed out; he was so wretchedly enchained and now a new wild hope flared up in him. And sure enough, there she stood waiting for him by the corner of the house, her heart in her mouth, but waiting.

'You must keep yourself awake,' said she.

'I am awake,' said he, perplexed.

'Ay, for now he has gone wild, he's feeling the after-effects of his drinking.'

'Was that what you wanted of me?' he asked, grateful at once. 'Were you wanting to save me, then?'

'No. Oh, yes, that too, but— Only so you keep yourself awake! I'm so frightened!' She paused there for a moment then went running back to the guest-house.

Naturally, it was that husband of hers she was wanting to protect! She wanted to keep him out of things so that he wouldn't have to go to jail again! Edevart went back to bed but lay awake for the rest of the night; he spent his time wishing he were well away from this unlucky place and back home in Polden; ay, he would be going home as soon as he had an opportunity. He had just received a letter from his father thanking him for the money he had sent: it had proved a grand help to him and was a gift which had meant food for the winter and a new turf roof for the home which had been leaking and besides that, nice new dresses for the little girls—Josefina from Kleiva, clever one that she was, had made them. The letter had been written by Joakim who was a little genius when it came to reading and writing, much brighter at both than ever Edevart was, a freckle-faced lad who was dangerous to have as an opponent in a wrestling match—he was a master of the 'crowfoot.' Concerning himself, Joakim wrote that he had signed up for the Lofoten fishing as one of Karolus' crew and later on would go seining for herring, if any shoals came in. He had been fourteen years old the fourth of last August but had been confirmed ahead of time and was to be given a full-hand's rating in Lofoten.

Well, well, well! That Joakim was a lad for you! Edevart had no doubts as far as he was concerned; he wouldn't waste his time with day-dreaming and all that sort of thing which would only make him lose himself.

In the morning Edevart took his place in the store and began to wait on customers. Not many had come, but he saw Lovisa Margreta and that husband of hers out in the vestibule where the stoves and spades and other iron tools were kept and she was clinging to his arm and seemed to be urging him to leave. But instead of that, he came into the store and took a stand in front of the counter. He took off his knapsack and set it down.

'We'll be going at once,' said Lovisa Margreta. 'We only want to get something we forgot yesterday.'

Haakon must have slept off the worst of his jag, he wore a shame-faced expression and his eyes were blood-shot. He was anything but friendly in his manner, but he called for the articles he needed and paid for them without argument. The red-haired girl he had been talking with the day before came in and began to buy a few things from the other store clerks; Lovisa Margreta turned pale when she saw her and stepped between her and Haakon, but this was nothing other than bad temper and foolish jealousy on the part of Lovisa Margreta.

Edevart could not help a momentary feeling of pity for Haakon; he had thought things over during the night and had decided that it was not entirely unreasonable of Haakon Doppen to be distrusting him; his feeling of animosity was quite justified. Edevart himself would have been furious if placed in a similar circumstance. Hadn't he lived under one and the same roof with Lovisa Margreta for many weeks and stayed right on until only a couple of days before her husband returned? Ay, Haakon had justice on his side.

'That was a pretty quick end that dance of yours came to last night!' It was Haakon Doppen speaking to the red-haired girl.

'Ay,' she answered with a smile. 'How did it come about?'

'Ask that fellow over there with the gold rings on his fingers!'

Lovisa Margreta: 'Ugh! Come now, be good!'

Haakon obeyed her this time and was meek at once. He turned to Edevart and said: 'We weren't very good friends last night, were we, Comrade?'

Edevart sympathized with him more than ever now and simply muttered: 'Oh, that was nothing!'

This reply seemed only to aggravate Haakon; he was

not to be trifled with to-day, and here was that red-haired girl standing where she could hear everything! That knocking him down had been considered simply nothing at all wounded his manly pride; this fellow Edevart and the girl must not be given the impression that it would always be as easy to lick him as it had been the evening before. He said: 'So that was nothing, eh?'

Edevart did not reply.

'But more can come of it!' said Haakon and laughed in the direction of the girl.

Lovisa Margreta: 'Ay, now we're all ready to leave!'

Haakon looked at her: 'Oh, well, Lovisa Margreta, I suppose I'm not as I ought to be to you, I'm not so grand and elegant as certain other folk I don't have to mention by name; no, and I don't wear four gold rings on my fingers—'

'No, Haakon!' she groaned. '*Ak Herregud* . . .'

Haakon threw his knapsack over his shoulder and went with her out through the door. Edevart heard him saying as he left: 'I only wish I knew if he was wearing all those gold rings when he was working up my way . . .'

Thus passed the Christmas busy season, and thus passed Christmas itself and January and the early part of February.

Edevart was now put in charge of looking after various things on board the sloop in preparation for her voyage. 'Who is to be skipper?' he asked. 'I have a man coming,' said Knoff.

And now as usual, Knoff had no spare time to be fooling around with petty details; a man was coming and maybe he was and maybe he wasn't. Knoff had things to attend to. Look there, he had many sledges at work for him; in addition to his own horses, he had hired many other horses in the villages round about. And what were they doing? They were hauling stones from a scree far

up on the slope of a mountain, stone after stone, whole piles of enormous blocks of stone; down to the furthest warehouse with them. For Knoff was building a dock. Oh, and he was grateful for the snow and the clear winter air which made the sledging good.

And here he had enough for a dock indeed; he had only to lay all these stones one upon the other in a line. Ay, stones enough; but Knoff was building a regular dock with an outer bulwark to protect the ships from the sea and out there the water was over forty feet deep—divers from Trondhjem would have to come to do this part of the work, and besides these, masons and labourers and huge cranes and barges. The cost? Colossal!

Knoff had already had the tiniest bit of a taste of what it would cost him when every Saturday he had to pay ten men for hauling stone with their horses, in addition to his ten men up on the mountain who were blasting the rock and cutting it into blocks and loading these onto the sledges.

When the vessels were ready to sail, it fell to Edevart's lot to hire the crew to man the sloop and when he objected that this should be left to the skipper, Knoff hemmed and hawed; the skipper, it seemed, wasn't coming. No, the man he had intended for the command of the sloop had sent word that he couldn't come, so there was nothing else for it but make Edevart himself the skipper.

'I can't do it,' said Edevart.

Knoff looked at his watch and was pressed for time, but he was forced to stop and explain: 'All you have to do is to sail in the wake of the schooner which is commanded by my regular skipper. Didn't you tell me anyway that you had some experience buying fish at Lofoten? All well and good, buy fish; you will get your money from the schooner, so make your arrangements with her skipper.'

Edevart continued to object and Knoff met his objec-

tions. 'You don't want to have the sloop lay over here, do you?'

'No, but—'

'I haven't time to keep on standing here. You are to take command of the sloop.'

Honourable indeed was the position Edevart had been offered and he couldn't hold off any longer. Wasn't it something that August had taught him how to navigate a sloop? Of course, and the knowledge he had of the chart which covered the voyage to Nordland came in quite handy, too. He decided to take a chance.

He turned and overtook Knoff. 'You've an old herring-seine hanging up in the warehouse,' said he. 'What do you want for it?'

'The herring-net? What do you want with it, anyway?'

'I would like to have it.'

Knoff thought for a moment and said: 'All right, take the seine. We can come to an agreement as to price later on.'

Another proof of the Chief's great confidence in him; not everyone in the world would have had a herring-seine handed over to him simply on the strength of his face. Of course not; but then again, neither would everyone in the world have had such a brilliant idea about building a dock as Edevart had.

The final days had come; everything had to be looked to, the provisions had to be stowed away and, along with these, the cask of *brændevin* and the kringles and whole mountains of salt. Edevart found it also necessary to make something of his parting from Jomfru Ellingsen; here was something that couldn't be avoided, for she had shown a friendly feeling for him on several occasions of late, and, whatever the devil might be the matter with her, she laid great stress on their friendship, as though it were something which should last for all time. He wasn't so

deeply interested in Jomfru Ellingsen, and was by no means in love with her; it was only that such an exalted person as a housekeeper should think so well of him, that, instead of allowing her eyes to rest upon one or the other of the regular store lads, she allowed them to rest upon him. This fact increased his confidence in himself.

From the beginning, he found himself on good terms with Skipper Norem of the schooner. The latter was a grizzled old fellow who owned a little farm a short way out from town; a prosperous man, after a fashion. Edevart was invited to his house and spent a whole day there amid a superabundance of food and drink. It later dawned upon Edevart what all this hospitality signified. The Skipper had only sons in his family, no daughter whom he was hoping to marry off. No, but there was another matter in which he desired to be assured of Edevart's goodwill.

And then they sailed, the schooner in the lead, the sloop *Hermina*, Skipper Edevart Andreassen, in her wake. There was nothing to it at all, simply fair weather, starlight and lazy days. Edevart went ashore at Bodø to buy some new presents for his people at home, a skirt and a shawl for his mother, shoes and various other trifles for the rest; it filled his heart with joy to weigh them in his hand and imagine how they would be received—his sisters would come up to him with their little hands outstretched to thank him.

The voyage lasted a good three weeks because the weather had been too fair and calm, but at length they arrived at the wealthy old town of Skroven. Edevart was now on familiar ground. The fishing had just begun and the place was not crowded; only a few buyers had assembled. Acting upon Knoff's orders, they were to keep in constant touch with West Lofoten and in the event that the fish were running better in that quarter, to set sail for there at once.

When Karolus arrived with his crew in the eight-oar Edevart's heart bounded with joy, for these were his friends and his neighbours from Polden. His brother Joakim had grown up and was here in the crew as a full hand; he had the family's powerful fists, but his own round freckled face. And what a meeting it turned out to be! What a surprise it was to them all! The people from Polden couldn't believe their own eyes that this was Edevart who was commanding an unknown sloop and who was here to buy their fish. It was beyond all comprehension, and what in the world had happened to him? He must have fallen heir to an Englishman's fortune, he must have been off in the land of Canaan! The whole crew came aboard his sloop and were treated to drinks and kringles. Teodor was among them; ay, the lad with the rupture. Since he had been along on the voyage to Bergen and was by this token the most widely travelled of the home-folk, he found himself in a position to talk familiarly about Edevart and say: 'Ho! There's a lad for you! Great things I have seen him do!' Teodor asked after August.

'Ay, August,' said Edevart. 'He's a regular magician; set him on a skerry in the sea and he'll grow wings and fly ashore! First he is in Riga and the next moment he is in Levanger, and each time he gets richer and richer!'

The fishermen stared with wide eyes at Edevart's changed appearance; he had to take off his snake ring and show it to them. Karolus said: 'Ay, and this is the way things are when we go out into the world and amount to something!'

One of the crew, old Seaman Martinus, then spoke. 'Ay, ay, and here's you, Karolus, such a one as you are, head-man of the village and everything else there is to be; and we others all say that's as it should be. But what are we ourselves? Dust and ashes, dust and ashes!'

They asked Edevart if he would be coming to Polden

to dry his fish and he answered that yes, he was. They asked him how much he would pay them a day and he answered that he would pay the same as the skippers on the other drying-grounds. With that they gave thanks for their food and left him.

Joakim remained on board; he told how things were at home and couldn't thank his brother enough for the money he had sent them. The hut now had a new roof and the little girls wore fine Sunday clothes when they went to church. Their mother had had a spell of sickness earlier in the winter and when Joakim left, she was still in bed, but she herself said it was nothing dangerous. Father was well and had been over the telegraph line once this winter. And other than that, no great changes had taken place in the village. Ay, Karolus was head-man now, for the store-keeper who had been head-man before him wanted them to build a road. 'And Karolus didn't think we could afford it' continued Joakim. 'And so he was elected. But that isn't all there is to be said about Karolus, for now his wife has changed entirely.'

'How do you mean?' asked Edevart, with interest.

'She walks about and mumbles to herself, and out of her head she seems. They say she is bewitched.'

'Ane Maria?'

'Ay, can you ever understand it?' exclaimed Joakim. 'She who was so proud of herself and bold. Before, when the men-folk were off in Lofoten, she could stick a calf, if she had to. There's no one can understand it. Now she goes about and hears cries from the bog and says that it's that Skaaro who can't find peace for his soul. When Karolus came home and told her he was head-man, she said that now he must put the whole village to work and dig up the bog after Skaaro. She takes it all so terribly hard, this business about Skaaro, even though she did every-thing she could to keep him from going down that time.

And that makes it hard for Karolus—he was almost afraid to go away from home.'

Edevart brought out all the gifts he would have with him for his home-coming in the spring and even now he gave Joakim a bright hunting knife to hang on his belt and took him down in the hold to show him the seine. 'Do you see that herring-seine I have for you?'

Joakim didn't understand. 'For me?' he asked and began to feel of the seine. There it lay all heavy and brown, something easy to play with, like a mountain, let us say—ay, here was by all means a seine!

'What kind of—No, I'm not to have a seine of my own, am I?' asked Joakim.

'Ay, you're to have *this* seine!' said Edevart and swelled with pride.

Joakim, overwhelmed: 'God be praised for you!'

They both laughed with tears in their eyes, so moved they were, ay, touched to the depths of their souls. A bewitched light shone out of young Joakim's eyes—he was the owner of a seine, he could stand in a circle of men and set each man in his place, he could stretch the seine across an open channel and catch a fortune deep in its folds, and half the fortune would belong to the owner of the seine.

The brothers discussed the seine, how long it was, where it had come from, how much it had cost, and Joakim would have liked to take it with him right then and there; however, a herring-seine is no mere pocket-piece, but a cargo for an eight-oar, and they were both agreed that Karolus must take the seine with him when he was returning home. In the meantime, they would hire a shed for it ashore.

The days passed. The weather was changeable and the fishing very poor. On board Edevart's vessel everything was in readiness, the splitting-room cleared for action, and the salt and the barrels for the cod-liver oil out within

reach. The man who was to split open the fish let no day go by without fussing around with his heavy knives. But the fishing remained poor. Edevart bought all he could get hold of, but these hardly covered the keel.

Skipper Norem came to him and stated that he had received a report from the west; the fishing was no better in that quarter than it was here, but as there were no buyers there to speak of, he was of the opinion that it would be better if one of them moved on to West Lofoten and that it might as well be the schooner. He handed over some money to Edevart and talked in a friendly and fatherly fashion to him. And now he had something important to tell Edevart, to tell that young friend of his. There was one thing they might as well be agreed upon, not such a great thing after all, but still . . .

Norem had spent long years in serving Knoff, had bought fish for him for the past twelve years and he had always done well by him. And now there was no reason why they should be more stupid than other skippers and stand in the way of their own good—one of the vessels might pay a few cents more, the other a few cents less and the owner wouldn't be able to follow the prices from day to day—that would be impossible, and Knoff had other things to think of.

Coming to the point, it was only that Skipper Norem wanted ever so gently to suggest to Edevart that they be agreed upon one thing and that was to cheat Knoff a little, just cheat him a tiny wee bit when it came to buying up fish. What did his young friend think of that?

Edevart didn't reply immediately.

It was like this: If it so happened that they got the fish for a few cents less, they could just as well slip the extra change into their own pockets, couldn't they?

'Of course,' said Edevart. 'But when is the fish ever a few cents less? It never is. There is only one market price.'

'Ay,' replied Norem to this very inexperienced lad. 'But 'tis we ourselves who set the market price, and we set it a couple of cents high so there can be something in it for us, too.'

'Oh, so that's it!' said Edevart. He remembered what his comrade August had hinted at that time, that one could always go in for a little personal speculation when it came to buying fish. It was a common practice and August knew all about it—August was well up on all such matters.

'Ay, that's the way it is,' continued Norem. 'Knoff doesn't ask of the other vessels how much they paid on such and such a day last winter, and if he did ask he would probably get the same answer from everybody, for the other skippers are doing the same as we are—in fact I learned this business from them.'

'Oh, well, if that's the way it's done—!' said Edevart at length and didn't turn the proposition down.

It could be done all right and made to show a profit, too, thought Norem, that venerable old man, that owner of a farm, that prosperous gentleman. It was only that they should come to an agreement that one of them shouldn't write one thing and the other something else in the book. And now it would be helping things considerably if the two vessels parted company and the schooner sailed west; but they must take care that the price they each paid for fish in the two places shouldn't show too great a difference.

When Skipper Norem left, he put out his hand to his young and very good friend and Edevart grasped it as a token of solemn agreement. What else should he do? Even if he were to tell the owner about how things were being handled, he would certainly not be believed, for Norem had been with Knoff a great many years, and anyway, why should Edevart be posing as something better than the others, why should he be standing in his own

way? But oh, hadn't that Norem been a clever rascal though, to invite Edevart to his home for a whole day and to use friendship and hospitality simply to make a rascal of him as well!

But such was human nature.

And then the cod ran strong and there was good fishing for quite a while. Edevart bought and bought and the pennies rolled in for him, they jingled and came to rest in their little hiding place in one of his table drawers. And they kept right on coming until the middle of March when a great storm broke loose and put a stop to everything. The storm signals had been flying for three days.

For a long time afterward folk kept remembering that storm, that fury of the elements which had lasted a day and a night and which had shaken the earth and stricken terror to the heart. It began with an ominous stillness: everything seemed numbed, even the sea-birds were quiet, and the earth was gripped in a vise. This terrible dead calm was almost the worst thing about it, for nothing else but the calm seemed to exist, a running down of the earth's machinery which no one could understand. For twelve hours the world stood still as though it were out of order, as though its mainspring had been broken—it was enough to make the mind turn foolish. Ay, and then a miserable little blade of grass growing on the thatched roof of a fisherman's cabin begins ever so little to tremble, and then a puff of wind leaks into the stillness, the sea comes to life again, and there, far off in the distance, something begins to approach—something like the edge of a sheet being pulled up over the sea, with a weird little prelude of sound—it comes and keeps coming!

First the sound of an oboe; it whines and is joined by others, many others; and then there are bassoons, and at length the crashing of pipe-organs—a fury and madness of sound. Inside of two hours the sea was a white raging chaos.

Things didn't go very hard for the fishermen, though; they had had twelve hours in which to drag their gear to safety and in some houses and cabins the men had taken the trouble to fasten down their roofs with hawsers. By the third day, the worst of the gale was over, all that remained of it was a constant rumble of waves and a half-moon which lay askew in the sky as the clouds sped over it and reminded one of an eye that was crossed. The storm signals were hauled down.

A week went by before there was any more fishing to speak of, and that was partly the fault of the fishermen themselves—they looked for the shoals where they had been swimming before the storm, but the fish had moved. They searched further out—no. They turned and came back quite close to the shore, and there they met the cod returning from land shelters where they had apparently sought refuge against the hurricane. In a week or so the fishing became excellent again and Edevart bought and bought; the pennies turned into bank-notes and the bank-notes he had on hand were a good beginning for a wallet.

When Easter came, Karolus and his crew went home for a few days. Karolus was anxious to see whether his wife's condition had improved. Joakim did not let this opportunity slip by to transport his herring-net home to Polden and loaded it into the eight-oar. Edevart gave him a couple of dollars from his savings to take to his father. Oh, that father of his, who hardly ever had anything to say, and simply shook his head, overcome by each bit of help he received.

But Easter went by and Karolus and his crew did not return. Fishing was resumed immediately after the holidays and Edevart continued to buy, but on the seventh day after Easter Karolus had still not returned to Skroven. What could be the matter? Edevart telegraphed, but received no answer until the tenth day after Easter. And then the answer came from Joakim; he wrote that he had

made a catch with the seine in Hommelviken, just outside of Polden. Ay, herring to delight the eye, a good big catch, a buyer or two already—salt and barrels had also arrived. No, the crew would not be returning to Skroven this winter. Kind regards. . .

Much was there to be written and talked about concerning this herring-strike—an act of Providence it was, a sign from the heavens and a fairy tale.

That devil of a Joakim, he kept his eyes in his head, he did; and then as before, his one concern had been the seine. On the way home, as they were passing outside the little bay of Hommel, a long and narrow estuary where a creek flowed into the sea, he happened to notice a great flock of birds following several spouting whales in one grand rush for the shore. Joakim had been out with a seine-crew after herring the year before and he knew at once what this demonstration signified. He cried out to Karolus to shift the tack! Karolus was at first unwilling, for he was hurrying home to Ane Maria; but no Nordlander can ever be downright indifferent to the habits of whales and sea-birds. Ay, and Karolus gave in. They conferred for a minute or two; this was a time for quick action. How they got hold of a four-oar in Outer Polden, how they fastened one end of the seine to a rock on shore and how they got back into a position to encounter the herring-shoal just at the crucial moment, none of them could later understand themselves.

Whales and droves of birds came thundering in from the sea—'If only they don't turn around now?' prayed Joakim, Head Fisherman and Seine-owner Joakim. He was waiting for the moment to act; it was his plan to cut through the shoal and, rowing the loose end around in a large arc, to stretch the seine across the entire mouth of the bay. The bird-flock was already passing over their heads and herring surrounded them on all sides.

'Row!' ordered Joakim, and every man pulled for all he was worth.

They were literally rowing through herring, they seemed to be lifted high and dry. Karolus was of the opinion that they were making too short an arc, but Head Seiner Joakim shouted and pointed. 'Head in again!' he cried. 'Ho!—Now straight ahead!—I don't want to have a net full of whales!"

It was a miracle how it happened; the herring divided as soon as the seine had cloven it, and the whales went on in pursuit of the shoal which was swinging back out to sea. When they reached the other side of the bay with the loose end of the seine, there were still several fathoms of it to spare.

The catch had been made, but they worked until evening making sure that everything was in order. They had no water-glass but they knew from previous experience that the bottom here in the bay of Hommel was clean; they saw to a couple of places where they feared the seine might be torn and then they went ashore and made their fastenings many times tighter in order to resist the tremendous pressure of the herring. Now if only the seine would hold!

The catch had been made; the crew of the eight-oar had come in for a marvellous piece of good luck. As far as Head-man Karolus and other experienced men could make out, it had been that same blessed hurricane which had been active here as well, driving the whales and herring in toward the coast. In Polden folk had many dark and unpleasant things to say of the days when the storm had been raging—they had heard thunder from the sky such as they had never heard before and they had lived through the greatest storm any of them had ever witnessed. One woman had been hauling wood from the forest, but both she and the horse had been knocked head over heels; a roof here, a whole house there had gone bounding into the

sea—no wonder then, that folk whined and clung one to the other and prayed to God. And no wonder either that Ane Maria who already had been slightly out of her head, was almost broken in two and took to her bed with a bandage over her mouth, as though she were trying to keep herself from crying something aloud.

Oh, but hardly had the hurricane died away, than folk straightened their backs and actually appeared to be ashamed of having prayed to God. But that wasn't all: when Karolus and his crew arrived home for the holidays with herring-scales on their clothes and the news that they had made a catch right outside of Polden and would now be earning much money—ah, then the hearts of the people there in that miserable village became light again, and even Ane Maria got up from her bed and took the bandage from her mouth and was for a time as merry as the others.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was late winter now and there was danger that the fish might die in the net. The men would have to hurry to dispose of them, for no fish could live very long on nothing.

Joakim went running that very night to tell the store-keeper and get him to telegraph the news abroad and to supply salt and barrels. Store-keeper Gabrielsen was in an unpleasant frame of mind over his recent failure to maintain his office of head-man, and he said: 'Why don't you go to the new head-man?'

They both laughed a bit at this and in the end Gabrielsen agreed to take charge of the whole affair; it was night, but telegrams went flying through the dark in all directions. By Easter Monday a little cargo-steamer hove to in Hommelviken and began to take on herring and two days later a couple of sailing vessels arrived.

There was no Easter to speak of for the Poldeners this year, no sleepy snores, no laziness and no going to church as usual; they cleaned and salted away herring from early morning until late at night. Later, many vessels arrived. There was such great traffic and activity in that desolate region, that folk even from the neighbouring villages were attracted. Money? Money rained down in torrents; it came by ship and it came by mail and by wire—Hommelviken had been put on the map and every cottage and hayshed in the vicinity was a lodging-house for herring-men. A shower of money from Heaven itself, it was—the store-keeper's wife took in a penny or two a night from each of her guests and the daughter of the

house flew about engaged to two herring-men at once, though she had hardly turned sixteen years of age!

And store-keeper Gabrielsen could not help taking advantage of this unusual turn of prosperity in the district. He received goods to sell from one ship after the other, but for all that, he never had enough on hand—his stock ran out between ships. At length he sent his wife off to Trondhjem to buy up whole mountains of dress-goods and glass-ware and sweetmeats, floor-mats and long-stemmed pipes, silk scarves, and even fiddles and accordions; and these last she bought and brought home with her. And now it turned out that Gabrielsen's little store was altogether too small for him, it didn't have room for all this enormous stock,—so he found it necessary to build. From the south came boards and planks and carpenters, then several weeks' work, and there stood a building such as Gabrielsen had never before dared even to dream of owning. Thus had progress in one quarter given rise to progress in another. Folk got so they could afford to buy expensive things and to clothe themselves in materials imported from abroad. Gabrielsen went on selling. His servant-girl Olga, who before had owned, as her choicest article of possession, a pearl belt, now went in for nothing less than a crinoline and ready-made stockings. With the men, vests became all the rage, vests made from imitation astrakhan, and on Sunday one was properly attired only if one wore canvas gloves. Fruit-wine by the keg was no longer good form; one must now have wine by the case from the south with gold seals and coloured labels on the bottles. Prior to this, marriage had been the one high festival; now, however, there were feasts at baptism, confirmation, and burial of the dead. Store-keeper Gabrielsen stood in his new place of business and sold Roquefort cheese from France and eggs from Denmark to the parishes round about him, and he raised their standard of living far above what they were accustomed to.

The weeks slid along as though they were mounted on wheels and seine-owner Joakim lay down to rest only when it was absolutely necessary—the rest of the time he worked at his herring. He was filled with his great adventure and thought of nothing else. No wonder, then, that it was not until the tenth day after Easter that he notified Edevart. He was so young and taken up with his work! And besides, he was deeply impressed with his new importance. He had all the young girls staring at him, even though he was only fifteen years old and freckled into the bargain. And he also had the old men, the fathers of families, obeying all his orders. He had got himself a coat, one made for a grown-up man, and this, although it was too big for him, had to go with his short trousers, which were too small for him—but what mattered such a mere detail! He sold his herring, and was everywhere at once. At length he had to lower his price a bit. But for all that, he was a wizard at writing and figuring and nobody could fool him. Marvellous it was, that this was the same young Joakim who, a couple of years before, had gone about with a running nose and snaggle-teeth! Now, by the aid of God in Heaven, he had become the village miracle-man; there was not a house but lodged herring-men who were in his employ and his own small sisters stood salting down herring and earning money, although they could hardly reach down to the bottoms of the barrels. This youngster Joakim, by the aid of God, had inaugurated good times for all, a golden era, and the only trouble was that his mother lay suffering, unable to die.

The last little remnants of the herring were spoiled. But this was only to be expected, as it was already late in April and the snow was thawing under a warm spring sun. Joakim was now selling herring for the purpose of illumination, that is, for lamp-oil; he let the Poldeners have herring for fodder, a blessing in their present state of need; the animals stood up to their ears in herring,

the milk tasted of herring and the lard tasted of herring. Store-keeper Gabrielsen kept hens and every egg they laid tasted as though it had been laid by a herring. At length the bottom of the seine was scraped and these remnants of herring were sold for fertilizer.

A marvellous golden era, taken as a whole. Once again Hommelviken lay abandoned and desolate, but what difference did that make? For here came Edevart with the sloop *Hermina*, casting anchor in the very place where the *Seagull* had lain the year before.

Edevart arrived too late to gladden his mother's heart with the lovely shawl and dress he had for her. Had he returned two days earlier, she would have looked upon his gifts and smiled—one last smile filled to the brim with tenderness for her son.

And now he stood there with his gifts, but empty-handed none the less. His heart was heavy over his long neglect of his family. With a few warm clothes, he might have saved his mother. Instead of that, he had scattered his gifts from Bergen about that love-nest of his in Fosenland. If only he had made up for this when in Trondhjem by sending home a package. Oh, he had thought of it now and then, to be sure, but had neglected it after all.

He gave his little sisters the shoes and the other small gifts he had bought for them. Wonderful presents they seemed to him and the little girls were pleased enough, but even so—he had arrived back home too late.

His sisters now had money they had earned themselves and could just as well buy their own shoes and odds and ends of Gabrielsen's store, they let him see. In fact, they had already visited the store. Their throats were no longer bare, they wore little scarves about their necks, little blue scarves of real silk—what did they want, then, with the blue silk neck-scarf which their brother Edevart had brought them? Oh, if he had only brought them a red one! 'Ay, but mine, you see, came from the city,' said Ede-

vart. And in desperation, he added: 'Wait here a minute, there's something else I have for you.' He happened to remember the little gold locket; he had been ready to give this away, too, down in Fosenland and the only thing that had stopped him was the fact that Lovisa Margreta had been afraid to accept it.

'This is what I have for you!' he said to the elder of his sisters. And now a flame flashed in her eyes and her lips parted eagerly, oh! . . . The other sister, sitting nearby, tried to show pleasure too. H'm, but her mouth wasn't smiling! Edevart drew his snake-ring from his finger and slipped it into her hand. 'And this is for you!' he said.

The little one lost her head entirely—What! a three-banded ring, a snake's head, gold! But what is she to do with it?

'You must wear it on a string around your neck,' he said. And he continued as he imagined August might have done: 'That's the way they do in Russia!'

'Oh!' said the sisters.

Edevart realized that something was wrong and continued: 'But if you would rather wear it on your finger, we'll have to squeeze it together a bit, like this, and then we'll have you almost a four-banded ring!'

A look of excitement came into the eyes of the sisters as they watched him squeeze the ring together. The younger tried it on and yes, there it had actually become four rings, which entirely covered the tiny finger the little girl put forth. But the ring was still too large. 'The only way out of it I can see, then, is for you to trade presents,' said Edevart. And this the girls did.

But the affair had disappointed him; the only present that really amounted to anything in the eyes of his family was the two extra dollars which he had given to his father out of his savings. These came in handy, for the funeral would cost money—the preacher would be collecting a dollar for meeting the body at the graveyard and accom-

panying it to the grave, and another dollar for the sermon. Joakim, however, wanted to pay for everything.

But all in all Edevart had been disappointed in his home-coming. He missed the old sincerity, the homely hospitality and innocence. Folk seemed to have changed their way of thinking. The little girls were grateful for their golden presents—you couldn't deny that! But they had thanked him without putting out their hands, as they always had done in the past. Formerly it was enough to make one weep, to see them come forward with tiny hands outstretched; now they merely said 'thanks.'

His father shook hands when he received his two dollars—he was old-fashioned and unspoiled. He was too overcome to utter a word, ay, but he said thanks with his hands.

There was something wrong with the place! Edevart said to Joakim: 'It seems to me that you have spoiled the people with that herring-strike of yours!' It had even come to pass that no one in Polden took any pleasure in the fact that again a sloop lay in the fjord with a cargo of fish to be dried. They were now used to better things; now they had earned more than twice as much at the herring.

Already, when Edevart had given orders to have the cargo unloaded and cleaned, Karolus had come at the head of a delegation and demanded higher wages.

'But we agreed upon a price in Skroven,' said Edevart.

'Ay, but better times have come since then,' they answered in their new little prosperous manner.

They even asked higher rent for the fish-rocks this year because better times had come. Edevart threatened to leave them and sail elsewhere with the sloop.

'Where will you go?' they asked, for they knew that the neighbouring drying-grounds had been rented.

'South,' answered Edevart.

'Just as you say!' said the Poldeners, for they were prosperous now. They would be just as well satisfied to

rest during this summer without lifting a hand to do anything. Joakim's seine-crew in particular were indifferent about drying the cod.

Edevart was forced to telegraph his owner to know whether he should come south or not. Knoff answered that all the drying-grounds in the south were in use, but he left the entire matter in Edevart's hands. The result was that the sloop *Hermina* was forced to pay higher rent and higher wages in Polden rather than take a slim chance of finding a place open to her further south.

No, Polden was not what it had been before; the spirit of the place had changed. Even Joakim had had too much good fortune and couldn't come down to earth. Edevart offered him a place aboard the sloop—he had sent home the two Fosenlanders and was in need of a man. 'You can have the same place I had with August aboard the *Seagull*,' said he.

Joakim refused; he had had a taste of what it was like to be the boss of a seine-crew and to make a big catch of herring, and now he was going out with his seine and fish for herring in Vesteraalen—he had already equipped a seine-boat and was getting things into shape.

Edevart could not help becoming angry at his brother; this youngster wasn't even dry behind the ears yet and here he was, going about putting on grown-up airs! 'How much money have you got left?' asked Edevart. Joakim told him. 'Then it'll be better if I keep it for you.' Joakim handed over all the money he could spare; he would have much preferred to keep it all in his own pocket, but Edevart was his big brother and had been to Bergen and all that; furthermore, the seine had come from him in the first place.

The work of cleaning the cargo of fish went slowly. Edevart had expected more goodwill from his fellow Poldeners. Hadn't he conceded to their demands in every way and raised their wages? What was the matter with

them, then? They came to work late in the morning and quit early in the evening, came and went as though they were their own masters. Of course they were paid accordingly, so much and no more for each fisherman's hundred fish, but Edevart felt that he was badly treated none the less, for the work dragged and he lost a good deal of valuable time. And then too, all this would injure his reputation as skipper.

He scolded them for their laziness. They answered that working at this raw, salty fish all day long was hard on their hands, it made them swell; and besides this, it soiled their clothes. Edevart answered that the work was no more disagreeable now than it had been the year before; but yes, it was, according to them; yes, it was worse than last year. In the first place, because times were better now, and in the second place because the fish were larger this year and full of filth and nastiness; besides, they were saltier.

'All right,' nodded Edevart as if he were a regular grown-up man. 'But you may yet live to see seven lean years in Polden!'

This made them angry, and remembering how Edevart had been turned down by the pastor when he first came up for confirmation, they spitefully asked him if all the learning he had taken into his head as a child was still there.

Edevart bit his lip and made no reply; but he had an unpleasant feeling that maybe it was better down in Fosenland among strangers than it was back here in Polden. Certainly he was more respected down there, for there he had risen to the position of clerk in the store and was allowed to eat at a rich man's table.

If only August had been here! He certainly would have taught the men to obey with a revolver in his hand, if necessary,—they wouldn't dare try him too far. No one here knew all there was to know about August either—

he had come from the mist and the deep—he might even have gone to school with the devil.

The cleaning of the fish would have gone badly if Beret hadn't stepped in. Oh, that Beret! There was a girl for you! Young and good-humoured, the wife of a quiet little man. She brought with her Josefina from Kleiva, the young widow, and these two went to work like a couple of men standing knee-deep in the sea and cleaning fish. They made lots of money, that they did, and Edevart was not stingy about offering them drinks and kringles. They worked like mad and put the men to shame. These two young women whose reputations certainly were not of the best, and who were considered decidedly flighty creatures, proved to be quick and clever when it came to all kinds of work. Could this be just to tempt skipper Edevart, that eighteen-year-old youth? Could it be simply that they were hoping to be engaged as packers toward the close of summer when the fish was dry so that they could come down into the cabin and experience one thing or another? Whatever it was, they cleaned fish and made it ready for drying. And thanks to that, the sloop *Hermina* was cleared of her cargo and swabbed.

When the regular drying of the fish began, the men were less often seen on the ledges; the work was taken over by their wives and children. Edevart's own small sisters were among the workers. Edevart had no helpers either on board or ashore. He should have scraped and painted the sloop, but that would have to wait, as it was far more important to see that the fish was dried; he should have had some one to cook his food for him, but here too he got along as best he could—he lived on dried meat and coffee and made no complaints about his fare. Gradually he became thin in the face and seldom laughed, but it didn't hurt him any to have responsibilities. And it was no small responsibility either which rested upon his

shoulders—a valuable cargo of fish was nothing to be treated lightly. All his knowledge of fish-drying had been gained during the previous summer when he had been with August, no great experience after all, but a good foundation; and now he did not shirk learning even more about the work. Many were the hours he lay awake at night and there never was a Sunday that he was not ashore looking to the fish.

The seine-crew had gone cruising at random since no definite movements of herring shoals had been reported to them. Karolus was able to leave his wife now. She had recovered from her illness and could eat and sleep again. Spring had come with its long bright days and there was money in the house; Ane Maria had grown young and pretty again. She had even been to Gabrielsen's store and bought herself some finery. She went to the ledges, not because she had to, but simply to be where the others were and to show them that she wasn't queer any longer. And she had become pretty indeed during these past few weeks. A dainty and toothsome young woman. The ledge-women talked with her just as though nothing had happened and her answers were never anything but normal. She laughed indulgently when the others made their little jokes. She was quite well again.

And then something happened, nothing much to speak of, a trivial affair indeed: A little old woman came out to the fish-rocks one day, Ragna's grandmother, who had reared her from childhood. Her face was all wizened and old and her hands were oh, so small! She wasn't much good for any kind of work and she hadn't even been with the fish-driers the year before; but here she was this year even older than she had been before, standing there without saying a word. She was given something to do just the same—Edevart picked out for her the lightest task he could think of.

One day he asked her: 'Why doesn't Ragna come out on the rocks?'

'No'; that was all the old woman said for an answer.

'Is she sick? Isn't she home?'

'Of course, she's home.'

Since he couldn't get any satisfaction by questioning her, he said: 'Oh, well, I just thought she might have been here with the rest of us.'

'No,' said the old woman and shook her head.

There must be something wrong with Ragna, God knows, but he had so many important matters of his own to attend to that he couldn't stop to ask further questions.

The following day was Sunday, and as usual, he rowed himself ashore to see how the drying of the fish had progressed. He saw a woman coming toward him on the country road. She was taking a roundabout way to keep from going through Polden. Could that be Ragna, he thought and yes, of course, it was Ragna! Once he had been in love with her, she had been the prettiest girl in school; and here she was coming in his direction. He pretended interest in the fish simply to keep from standing there staring at her, but as soon as she was near enough to hear him, he said: 'Well, well, so here you are taking a walk!'

Oh, youth! They both turned red as beets.

She kept her head turned away most of the time and she had little to say; but he suspected that she knew he had asked about her the day before. Since they were both too shy to talk to each other, he suddenly invited her, with a kind of skipperly pride, to come aboard the sloop with him. 'You can make a little coffee for me,' he said.

She refused. No, she was just out taking a little walk since it was Sunday and anyway, she wasn't dressed for the occasion.

He looked at her, speechless. Wasn't dressed well enough? Was she out of her head?

'Oh, no,' said she.

He understood very well why she was holding back and he said bashfully how hard it was for him to be alone on board—he hadn't even had any coffee to-day!

That did the trick! She seemed to feel sorry for him and said: 'Oh, you poor fellow—since that's the case—'

He rowed with her out to the sloop. She was a bit awkward about climbing the ladder which swayed back and forth beneath her weight, but she got on deck none the less and waited until he had made the boat fast. He took her down to the galley and began to make a fire in the stove.

'I'm the one who really ought to be doing that!' she said, trying to sound gay. Then she sat down on the wood-box and let him go on fussing with the stove.

He could see how changed she was; he couldn't very well help noticing that. The saddest thing about it was that that pretty little face of hers had become unnatural and coarse; what a lot she must have been through!

'You must grind the coffee!' said he and handed her the coffee-mill. 'That bothers me more than anything.'

This made her laugh. Think of it, she still could laugh! He glanced at her. Her eyes were dancing just as of old! He didn't want her to think that he had brought her aboard for nothing and therefore he added: 'It's true what I'm saying, whenever I try to grind coffee, I always spill it in my lap.'

Then she laughed a little more and showed him how he should hold his knee against the drawer so it couldn't slip out, and he was extremely grateful for this bit of instruction and promised her never to forget it. She asked him if he had any cream, and cream he had none, but she could have some molasses, if she would like some of that. Ay, that would do very well, thank you!

They drank their coffee on deck and had buttered kringles to eat with it. 'That was good!' said Ragna and was grateful. She declined anything else.

Their excellent breakfast put new life into them and seemed to draw them closer together. But they were not what they had once been to each other, far from it—neither of them was as they had been, for they had both seen something of life. He had been in love with her during their school days and later as well; but it hadn't been anything very serious after all, simply puppy-love. Now here they were sitting together and it didn't make a great deal of difference to him what trouble she got herself into; it was only that he wanted to spare her feelings by not mentioning it.

'Would you like to see my quarters?' he asked.

Ay, that she would and went with him. There was no danger in this for her, she had nothing to fear from Edevart; and there was no danger for him either—she couldn't be tempting to any one in her present condition.

She sat down on the bench in that funny little hole he called his cabin; here was his bunk and here his table, and over there was the stove and there on the wall was a cupboard, and that was all there was.

'I'm going to have a drink now whether you'll have one or not!' he said like a grown-up man, and got out a bottle and glass. And sure enough, she, too, took a little of his mild brandy and said that it didn't taste bad at all. They went on talking for a little while about one thing or another, but nothing in particular. 'I wonder what she came for?' he thought to himself. She asked him what time it was and he told her. And now if she would stay aboard a bit longer, she could cook dinner for them, suggested Skipper Edevart. She smiled and shook her head at such greediness on his part and asked him if he were hungry again so soon! Not exactly that, but the cooking

would take some time. What did he want for dinner? Regular ship's grub—peas, meat and bacon.

With that it seemed as though she couldn't stand it a minute longer and suddenly she burst out: 'Oh, you must tell me what I have to do!'

'How so?'

'Oh, because I'm as you can see I am,' and she said no more.

He realized that she had now come to the real purpose of her visit, but feigned ignorance in order to hear more and asked foolishly: 'What nonsense is that you are talking? Is the drink going to your head?'

She continued: 'He doesn't want to know about it. All he does is laugh at it.'

Edevart realized that he would no longer be able to avoid the issue, and asked: 'Who is it?'

'That skipper fellow; you know all about it,' she answered.

'The skipper? No, I don't know anything about it.'

'The skipper last year. When you came and found us in the bushes.'

Edevart, thoughtfully: 'It couldn't be him.'

'Why not? Of course it was him.'

'But you didn't want him. You were struggling to get away from him when I came, weren't you?'

'Ay, but anyway it was him,' she repeated doggedly.

'I can't understand it.'

'Good Lord! I tell you it couldn't be any one else—!'

'All right,' said Edevart and gave in. 'But he only laughs at it—is that what you said?'

'Ay; he doesn't believe it. He thinks, like you, that it isn't him.'

'Where have you seen him since then?'

'I've just been up to see him. He's up drying fish at Nordvaagen this year.'

'And all he does is laugh at it? Well, but what can I do about that?'

'I don't know—but it was him just the same.'

Edevart: 'You tried to get away; didn't I see that?'

Ragna, on the verge of tears: 'Ay, but that was after —he had been after me to be good to him once before.'

Edevart, silent for a long time: 'So that's the way things stand!'

So he had come too late that time! Too bad he had troubled himself by coming at all! He ran over the events of the previous year in his mind: there was a fire in Karolus' barn, Edevart had run down to the sloop for sea-buckets, and, missing Ragna when he returned to the barn, he went out to look for her. He found her in the bushes. Although she was only a youngster, there she was in the bushes! It had all happened during his short absence down at the sea. She must have been pretty willing, too! Why had he ever been so in love with her? She hadn't been thinking of him then, not for a single instant. She had given in at once. He remembered with a twinge that during their school days she hadn't paid much attention to him either—he was so stupid when it came to reading, and he always sat dreaming and could never remember a thing. The others used to laugh at him and she, too, had laughed with the others. He thought the whole thing over now and was upset because he had made a fool of himself by attempting to save her—that time when Skipper Skaaro wanted her to go down in his cabin with him. Why had he bothered about her? August would have said: 'Happy journey to you, go down with Skaaro!'

Perhaps he was suffering a bit from wounded pride; was that it? For many years he had looked upon her as his sweetheart, had kept her image in his heart, and that wasn't so very long ago either, only a few months—and

now here she was, coming to him with her trouble. He wouldn't be made a fool of again.

'Are you thinking about it?' she asked, timorously.

'About what? No,' he answered, withdrawing into himself. 'I have nothing to do with that.'

'No,' said she, crestfallen and without the courage to say anything further.

But now he began to think things over. Was he himself one hair's breadth better? What if he were to tell her about his own affair with Lovisa Margreta? He was worse than she, not better. He became gentle and said: 'I don't know what kind of advice I can give you.'

She took heart at this and spoke again, her eyes shining with faith in him. 'No,' she said. 'But I thought maybe you might put in a good word for me.'

'A good word? I don't see how a good word would do any good,' he answered. Suddenly Edevart felt wrath well up within him; it was as though a great big shepherd dog had come and bitten a piece of flesh from the leg of a child. Now, as always, Edevart was quick to reach a decision; defiantly, he thought of a way out and said: 'I haven't time to be going away and leaving all this that I have on my hands here—'

'No,' she quickly admitted.

'But if you can wait until next Saturday night, I'll make a trip up to Nordvaagen.'

'God bless you for that!' she cried and flung out her hands at him. It was such a helpless gesture; she dropped her hands into her lap at once. Edevart was touched by the pathos of it and his lips trembled. 'And I don't think he'll be laughing either after I'm through talking with him!' said he vehemently.

'No, oh, no—'

There she sat, and it was Ragna, little Ragna who used to go to school with him and play games with him out in the pasture; how pretty she had been back in those days

when she laughed with her dainty mouth! He remembered how, whenever she came near him, a wave of sweetness would well up within him. There she sat now and it was still Ragna—but the green and brown checkered dress she now had on was old and faded and worn. She had not been able to join the other herring-workers and earn money as they had done. A bit of her undergarment had crept up about her neck and he noticed that on it there was fastened a black horn button, sewed on with a white thread. That button might have indicated that she was slovenly, but surely that was not the case—it was only that she didn't have anything better. It looked so untidy! And on her feet she was wearing a pair of shoes with wooden soles such as they usually wore in Polden—'clumpers' they were called.

He was overcome with pity for this unfortunate child and he dragged out his sea-chest from under his bunk. All this time he had been thinking of it, ay, as soon as he had learned of his mother's death, he had thought it was Ragna who ought to have that skirt and shawl. 'Look here!' he said harshly, to keep from showing his tenderness. 'You may have these rags!'

His words were clear enough, yet Ragna could not comprehend his meaning, and she didn't know what to make of it; first she looked at him and then she looked at the clothes. He threw them in her lap and tersely explained that he had bought them for his mother, but that now she was dead he didn't know what to do with them. They were too large for his sisters.

But that she should be the one to have them—she heard what he said and she saw him give them to her but could not believe it all! She began to cry, and, to hide her tears, she laughed crazily until she was unrecognizable. When she put out her swollen hand to thank him, she was unable to say a word—she merely uttered a few broken sobs. Her emotion seemed almost without

shame—it was too naked; she didn't even pay any attention to her nose which was running, and she let one garment fall to the floor while she was looking at the other.

'Try them on!' he said, and was immediately sorry for his words. He realized that she wouldn't be able to get into this skirt for some time now, so, without going any further, he raised her up from the bench and threw the shawl about her shoulders.

That shawl! It was exactly what she needed and had been needing for the past six months—it was something she could hide in! She stood there with it on and looked down at its folds. Who had ever seen such a shawl! Magnificent it was, with a silk cord running all around the edge—no one here owned such a shawl! Just see how it evened out her figure and concealed her condition—it made her look as though she were already past her difficulty. 'If any one had told me about this this morning!' said she, time and again. 'If any one had even mentioned it!' Then she sank back on the bench, exhausted, with the shawl still about her shoulders.

Edevart: 'H'm. Shall we say next Saturday then? I can be back here Monday in plenty of time to go to work.'

'Oh, that'll be too much for you!' she mumbled. But she didn't seem very much interested in what he was going to do next Saturday night—her own interest now was the shawl, her one bit of finery. She was only a child again.

'And now it must be dinner time,' he said.

When they returned on deck, Ragna became very still and had to go to the rail and spit a couple of times. She tried to make it appear as though nothing were the matter, but he knew well enough how eager she was to go ashore. And he rowed her quickly in to the beach.

Things couldn't have gone better; he supervised the drying of the fish and lived on dried meat and coffee. On Thursday morning Ragna's old grandmother came with a piece of news that set him to thinking deeply and for a time it seemed as though he might as well give up the trip to Nordvaagen that he had planned. Give it up? Was it unnecessary then? He puzzled over the question further and at length came to a decision: He should give up the trip!

The days passed and when Saturday night came, he got into the boat and rowed to Nordvaagen on a serious and important errand. He reached his destination sometime during the night.

Sunday morning he went aboard the Skipper's vessel. They didn't come to blows, they came to an agreement. The skipper went pale at first, overcome by the lad's audacity: what was this young pup thinking of?

Edevart: 'I didn't come here to lie to you; the baby is born.'

The Skipper laughed and showed his teeth. 'The baby? That's a great thing, that's rich! Go on ashore, you crazy loon! What baby?'

Edevart: 'I'm here to get the first bit of money you're going to help her out with.'

'Ashore with you, I said!' ordered the Skipper.

But it was a waste of breath for him to be telling this lad to get out. The Skipper tore open the collar of his shirt and a button popped off—now he could breathe a little bit better! But what was the advantage of that? He had a man up forward who mustn't hear of this affair. The Skipper didn't dare raise his voice for fear of attracting the fellow's attention. 'It's you yourself who got her into this trouble,' he said through clenched teeth, 'and now you're coming here and want to put the blame off onto me!'

Edevart gave him a look as wild and furious as a blow in the face: there were clenched fists in his eyes as he glared. 'We're not going to joke any more,' he said fiercely. His patience was exhausted; he turned pale and ground his teeth.

The Skipper: 'Who do you think you are to come here and make a fuss? I'm warning you that you had better be getting ashore while you're healthy! I've a man up forward.'

'I'll be doing you a favour if I don't take you and rip your insides out!' screamed Edevart and sprang up. 'I won't get out of here until I get some help for her from you, do you understand that?'

'Sh-sh, hold that mouth of yours, will you?' barked the Skipper. 'The whole town can hear you!'

Edevart, trembling: 'Come on with that man you've got up forward! Tell him to come here!'

That was just what the Skipper did not care to do; he had to keep him out of it at all costs, that neighbour of his from down Bergen way. The Skipper was really no coward at heart and he might have said to Edevart: 'My dear young friend, while you are at work ripping my insides out, what do you suppose I should be doing? Would I just sit here and look on?' But he didn't dare go too far with this crazy lad who was on the point of blowing up entirely and who didn't seem to care whom he might draw into this vulgar affair. The Skipper might also have insisted that it wasn't him, that it simply could not have been him, but that it was more likely to have been that desperate lad himself. And then, too, Edevart had come too soon to get help from him; no legal papers had as yet been issued, as far as the Skipper knew. Many were the objections he might have raised! But when it came down to the fine point, he wasn't particularly anxious to receive legal papers from the sheriff of his home village, for these would give him away to the world

at large; and God knows, there was one particular person back home who must never hear anything about the affair.

The Skipper was in a tight place, all right, and he thought it best to make some sort of an arrangement. He went down into his pocket, and brought forth a blue five-dollar bank-note and with that, the quarrel came to an end. Edevart began to be pacified. But they continued to bargain as to the amount and the end of the matter was that Edevart went home with a ten-dollar bill.

Well done! A devil of a good stroke of business! Especially since the child was born dead.

Monday morning he heard from the ledge-women what had taken place. Edevart affected complete ignorance. The only news he could rely upon would be that which was brought by Ragna's old grandmother, but she had little to say—she merely nodded her poor old head and kept on with her work while the others were gossiping.

'Well,' said Edevart. 'So the child was born dead?'

'Ay, and so much the better for that,' they answered.

Edevart had grown hair on his chest, all right. He became less and less scrupulous in thought and word and deed. He had cheated the Skipper up in Nordvaagen and he would gladly do it again if necessary, for he was unwilling that little Ragna should alone stand the expense of a situation it had taken two to produce. And now, if only she would make sensible use of her money and not fling it wildly about! She was up and around already, the grandmother told him in a word or two, and to-day she had gone off to the store.

The following day she appeared on the drying-ground, a bit pale of face and peaked, but otherwise well in body and spirit. She had come in the old woman's place. Edevart looked at her critically; ay, well she was, after a fashion, but certainly not strong enough to bend over and handle the heavy fish. Besides, she must have been

tired out after that long journey to the store on the previous day. So he ordered her to go aboard the sloop and prepare dinner for two; he found a small boy to row her out.

Ane Maria came up close to him and said: 'You might have had some one else for that. She isn't well.'

Edevart started. 'What's that?' he said. 'I had her go out and cook a bit of food just to give her some light work to do.'

'Oh, keep still about the food!' whispered Ane Maria, furious. 'It wasn't the food you were thinking about!'

Edevart's mouth fell open as he looked at Ane Maria whose face was deathly pale. 'It must be she isn't over her sickness yet,' he thought and decided not to answer her and run the risk of exciting her. Shortly afterward he noticed that she was crying.

What a devilish amount of evil and insanity and wretchedness had come to Polden! He could have endured it better in some strange place, but this was his home—he had not grown up with it and it was all strange to him. And doubly accursed it was that they planned now to teach him the trick of living at home again. Back here he had come after having been out in the world, to Bergen and such places, and he had not returned home empty-handed either—he came with a sloop and cargo, with work and wages for everyone; he came as a power to the place. And from every side he met only ingratitude and opposition and quarrelsomeness. They would have things done their way, not his. How was he to take all this? What did they mean by it? Ane Maria, his neighbour-woman, had stuck her nose into his affairs; for that he ought to tell her she was through working for him—he had authority enough to do that. Just wait a bit, on the day the fish was dry and the cargo stowed aboard, he would sail on his way. Provided there was wind enough? No! He wouldn't wait a single hour for wind, there was always

wind outside the fjord and, no matter what it cost him, he would have the sloop towed out to where there was wind.

Ragna called to him from the sloop that his dinner was ready and he waved his hand to let her know he had heard. He was in no hurry to come to dinner, he didn't jump as soon as he was called; no, he was the Skipper and would come when he felt like it. Things had come to a pretty pass when any one felt they could scream out to him that dinner was ready and order him to come! When his own expensive watch told him it was such and such an hour, exactly then he would come. Why, who in the world did these people think they were?

When he was ready to row himself out to the sloop, Ane Maria rushed up to him again. 'You mustn't give her anything to drink,' she said. 'It's dangerous.'

He became angry and replied: 'Oh, go on away with your crazy nonsense!'

'All right, I only meant to let you know.'

'Ay, you've had so many young ones yourself, you know all about it, is that what you're trying to tell me!'

'No,' said she with a meaning look. 'No, I've never had any young ones and I won't be having any either!'

And was that a signal to him, an invitation? Did she intend to announce herself as one with whom it was safe to be friends? Ane Maria wasn't crying any more. Her cheeks were pink now and she was coarse and bold. At all events, she had filled him with confusion. 'I didn't have the slightest intention of giving her a drink,' he said. 'She'll be left in peace as far as I am concerned.'

He was in a peevish frame of mind when he returned aboard the sloop. Ragna had done what was expected of her, but none the less, he wasn't pleased with her; it was evident that she had bought herself some finery while at the store the previous day, for here she was wearing ready-made underwear from the city, flimsy stuff with

lace around the neck. Where was her good old underwear with the horn-button? She was a great one to be going off to the store with a ten-dollar bank-note!

'Didn't you set a place for yourself?' he asked.

'No, I had something to eat by myself in the galley when you didn't come for so long,' she answered.

This reply didn't put him in a sweeter frame of mind, it showed ingratitude and lack of respect on her part. Oh, well, he was back home in the village where they addressed him with easy familiarity—he had gone to school with the younger generation. But he was better than they were, for all that; just keep that in your mind! thought Edevart.

He ate in silence and used the fine table manners he had learned while dining with Knoff. 'And to be correct, there really ought to be water on the table,' he said.

'I'll run and get you some water!' she said and hurried off.

He might have told her never mind, for he certainly was not in any great need of water, but he let her run off to get it. She returned and handed him the long-handled dipper which always hung by a string on the side of the water barrel. And he accepted the water, but in order not to let this opportunity to teach her something slip by, he got up and went to the cupboard for a glass, filled it, and silently handed the dipper back to her. She understood very well that she was to hang it back on the water barrel and left the room. She remained on deck.

When he came up, she asked meekly: 'What would you like me to do next?'

'First of all, you're to wash the dishes,' he replied. 'And then you can clean up the cabin.'

She was starting off to do this when he stopped her and said: 'What a funny one that Ane Maria is! Isn't she well yet?'

'Ay, she's well again. Why?'

'She didn't think you ought to come aboard and cook for me.'

'She didn't, eh!' said Ragna bitterly. 'Then of course she was thinking that she was the one to do it! Is that it?'

'No, she didn't say as much, but . . .'

'That's what she had in her mind most likely. She's like that now—she's got so she's crazy after every man. I won't even mention what Karolus, her own husband, said about her before he went away.'

Edevart rowed ashore.

In the afternoon when Ragna had finished cleaning up the store-room, she called out again and Edevart sent a small boy to fetch her. She reported to him that she had tidied up the cabin and scrubbed the stairs and washed the deck ports. 'I took the feather-bed out, too, and shook it,' she said.

'Good,' said Edevart.

'And did you try it?' Ane Maria couldn't help but ask.

'Try it? What should I be trying?'

'The feather-bed. I asked if you tried it?'

'You hussy!' said Ragna.

And then there was trouble between them. Edevart exercised his authority and ordered them to stop at once, but his orders went unheeded; they continued to quarrel without paying the slightest attention to him. Many harsh words passed between them and the ledge-women round about stopped their work entirely and stood listening and elbowing each other; the children learned much in a short length of time.

Ane Maria continued defiant; it was certain that serious trouble couldn't be avoided. Ragna screamed out what Karolus had said about his own wife before he went away: that it was impossible to satisfy her! And the ledge-women nodded their heads and repeated that this was what Karolus really had said, that they all could vouch for that! Nevertheless, after the quarrel was over and Ane

Maria was weeping bitterly, the women one by one went over to her side for the reason that she was more courageous than Ragna and because she was not so hesitant about loaning them a coffee-bean or two when they were needy and came to her.

Edevart had been treated without the respect which was due him and he considered telling Ane Maria later in the evening that her services were no longer needed on the ledges. It would be priceless to be able to tell her that, but he really didn't dare discharge a single worker—he must think only of finishing up the work and sailing away from Polden. One thing, however, he did do: he took a young lad aboard to cook for him; neither Ragna nor Ane Maria should come aboard from that day on—he would get along without the help of any woman.

This plan didn't turn out badly, either; the lad was twelve and wide awake; his name was Ezra and he came of a poor family, but he learned things quickly. The poor little shaver now had enough to eat, one thing he had always lacked at home. In the galley he ate until he was stuffed and he soon put on weight. He could now stand there on deck and play admiral for the benefit of the lads ashore and, sailor-like, he could spit over the rail. They called to him and asked him if he dared go up in the rigging and spin the weather-vane. No, Ezra couldn't do that yet and, anyway, there wasn't any weather-vane; but he practised when he was alone—since he slept on board at night, he could go aloft in his bare feet after dark and practise. A regular little madcap was Ezra!

And now a spell of quiet; the work on the ledges was progressing well and the fish was nearly white and dry. There came birch-bark for covering the piles at night, and money for Edevart's payroll. A few more days of fine weather while the fish lay drying in the sunshine, weighted down with large stones at night, and then they could start in packing the cargo.

Joakim returned with his seine-crew. The fortune-hunters had made no catch; they had lain in Vesteraalen all summer long, using up their provisions and wasting their days. They didn't regret it; they could afford well enough to be idle, but they had had some of the wind taken out of their sails. Nevertheless, no one seemed particularly interested in working. Take Karolus, for instance: Ane Maria had not let him out of her sight since the day of his return and she herself no longer appeared on the ledges. She would never set foot on the place again as long as Ragna was there! she said. Furthermore Karolus, the newly-elected head-man, was deluged upon his return with all kinds of official writing and figuring and many important questions to be decided. What a hard time he had of it! To be sure, he had gathered the village worthies together for a conference in his cottage but, as he could neither read nor write, he was forced to call Joakim in to help him. And this deprived Edevart of a large number of his workers. To make matters worse, Karolus refused to loan out his eight-oar when he himself could not be present. Stubborn opposition again from every quarter. And the fish was ready to be transferred back to the sloop.

In desperation Edevart borrowed Joakim's seine-boat without even asking for it, gathered up Teodor and some half-grown lads to man it, and things went tolerably well. Beret and Josefina from Kleiva were taken aboard as packers and Ezra, stationed on deck to toss the fish down to them, worked hard enough for two.

He had borrowed the boat; he might even dare take it.

One noon hour, when all had ceased work and sat munching their food, a great commotion arose on the ledges. Many cries and pointings. What in the name of Heaven! Will you look there! It was Ezra aloft in the rigging of the sloop. He was dangerously high up; he had let go the topmost halyard and was clinging to the upper

part of the mast. Hunching, he began with arms and legs to crawl still higher—shinning up the mast he was! Folk ashore held their breath as they watched; several little girls threw themselves down on the ground and clung to the rocks beneath them. Then Ezra spins an imaginary weather-vane—but that isn't all, he crawls still higher. Oh, that madcap, if he doesn't deserve a whipping! See, there he goes, he's passing the place for the weather-vane, now he's above it and now, because he is tall enough to do it, he reaches up with one of his hands and, gripping the very tip of the mast, hangs there, resting! If only he were down again! But Ezra didn't want to come down again; he stayed up there tempting God Himself. That sinful little devil of a lad, he ought to be spanked within an inch of his life. What now, was he thinking of ascending to Heaven? 'Don't call, for God's sake, don't say a single word to him!' folks warned each other down there on the ledges. Ezra pulled himself up inch by inch; like a monkey he clung to that slender tip of the mast and made it sway back and forth—and now he had pulled himself up until the top of the mast was level with his chest and there he stood, half his length in the air.—Here and there a moan could be heard below. 'Be still, be still!' they whispered. Ezra reached his destination; slowly he bent forward, lay on his belly on the masthead—and there he balanced himself.

Edevart and the packers stood motionless on the deck below. What else could they do, since they dared not utter a cry! And now Edevart, in his helplessness, climbed up in the shrouds a way and called: 'Ezra, come down from there at once, do you hear?' And his voice trembled as he spoke to him appealingly as though to a child.

'All right!' answers the lad above him, that little imp of Satan, with his head hanging down. 'All right!' is all he says in reply as he lifts his belly from the mast-head. It didn't take him very long to come down, either; the

worst stretch for him was by the imaginary weather-vane, but as he came further down and grabbed a halyard in his hand, it was only a moment or two before he was back down on deck.

Edevart boxed his ears a couple of times and much too gently too. But at the same time he promised that wild boy he would take him along to help sail the sloop on her voyage south.

On the morning of the last day when the cargo was almost entirely back on board, Karolus came to offer his services. He had not been able to help out before due to various conferences with the village worthies and all kinds of important office work. Joakim was with him. Edevart was inwardly boiling with rage, but he did not dare refuse the offer of these gentlemen,—he still needed men to help tow the sloop out of the fjord, in case there was a calm. Joakim he completely ignored.

They worked slowly indeed and puffed at their tasks, for they had become lazy after a whole summer of idleness. That evening Edevart announced, just as August had the summer before, that at nine o'clock on the following morning he would pay off his workers.

All night long Edevart sat getting his accounts into shape. He wrote wretchedly, but he was a demon at mental arithmetic and he juggled his two accounts like a genius: his own and the owner's account. Oh, he would be a rich man when he was finished with this transaction! In the morning he sent Ezra off to the telegraph station to advise Knoff that he was clearing Polden, and to look over the weather reports.

When the fish-driers were assembled, he paid them off each in his turn and Beret and Josefina from Kleiva both received generous extra wages because they had earned them; to his two small sisters he gave an additional dollar apiece. Everything had been figured out beforehand and entered in the account book as one item or another.

By noon he had finished his task. Ezra returned with the weather report: outlook not too favourable, steady rain and fog at sea. All well and good, they were in no particular need of clear weather to-night—they would be well away from land on their long voyage across Vestfjorden.

'And now will you two see about rowing me clear?' said Edevart.

'Rowing you clear? Are you sailing at night?' asked Karolus and Joakim.

'This very night!' answered Edevart.

He made the tow-line fast and took Teodor and Ezra over to the anchor windlass. When the men saw that he was in earnest, they lent him a hand and offered no further objections.

The towing proved easier than they had expected; a short distance out in the fjord they picked up a breeze and set the foresail. This helped considerably and they reached the open sea before sundown.

When the men had come aboard for their pay that morning, they had lent their assistance in raising the mainsail. To the very end Joakim had honestly expected to be taken on as one of the crew; he asked if Edevart weren't short-handed with only Teodor and Ezra; but he had crew enough. Oh well, he was not to think for a moment that Joakim really wanted to go along! No, for Joakim was going out seining again. He mentioned money he had coming to him and Edevart gave him a few dollars; when Joakim asked for more, his big brother answered that he would save the money for him.

CHAPTER NINE

HARD work and many difficulties over those stretches of open sea. That was to be expected, considering the crew was so small, and otherwise the voyage was speedy and without mishap.

They had received no specific orders from the owner and their first thought was to sail at once to Knoff's place and sign off as soon as they had turned over ship and cargo to him, but, remarkable as it may seem, they sailed right past Fosenland! The day was bright and there was a glorious breeze blowing, but they fooled around so long trying to find the right fjord, that they ended by passing far to the south of it. Teodor rather suspected that his skipper had done this purposely.

They arrived in Trondhjem during the night and Edevart reported by wire the following morning. Knoff was dumbfounded, but congratulated Edevart on his voyage and gave orders concerning the cargo. 'Wait for letter following,' he concluded.

From the merchant who purchased the cargo Edevart learned that the schooner had not yet arrived. Here was a feather in his cap! Youth and enterprise had counted for more than the experience of old Norem! And then he happened to hear another piece of news: that the bark *Soleglad* on her return voyage had gone down in the Baltic Sea; her crew had been rescued after taking to the boats, and all were back home again, but they had lost everything they had to their names.

Edevart started out at once to look for August. He was not hard to find; there he sat in a lodging-house, half drunk and poor; his face had aged and his clothes were

unkempt. And here was Edevart with money in his pocket, a skipper! He engaged a private room where he and his comrade might be alone and August told him of his misfortunes.

'I went through it once before,' he said. 'But that was a regular shipwreck in the middle of the ocean. To be shipwrecked in a duck-pond—ugh!' And he made a terrible face to express his contempt for the Baltic Sea.

He rambled on and on disconnectedly, wildly; in the very middle of an explanation he would start talking about something else, but everything he said was concerned solely with the tragedy which had befallen him.

'What am I going to do now?' he moaned. 'Is a person to be utterly ruined? I suppose you got that letter of mine and know just what happened to me? There isn't a single ray of hope left for me now. And I tell you this, there was never a person who made such a good start as I did—a few days more and I would have been sitting here on this chair a rich man. And I wouldn't have minded so much if it had been a regular honest-to-goodness shipwreck—that would have been my meat!—Here I've been shipwrecked many times before and saved both gold and silver; but this time I got back on land just by the skin of my teeth.'

'Didn't you rescue a thing?'

'What could I be rescuing! I had five big boxes full of silk and jewellery and other goods. What was I to do with them, just stick them in my pocket when I jumped overboard?'

August shook his head dejectedly; he was indeed low in spirits. He asked for something to eat and ravenously devoured everything that was set before him, washing his food down with beer and babbling on wildly throughout the entire meal. 'I suppose I can just as well eat a little food even if it won't do me any good. Rescue anything? No one rescued anything. When the captain got ashore he

didn't even have a cap to wear—all of us were entirely cleaned out.'

'Didn't you even have time to put your money in your pocket?'

'What money? I didn't have any money left; I invested it all in jewellery and precious stones! Ten big boxes . . .'

'Five, you said before.'

'Five? Ay, but aren't you forgetting that I had five more besides those? They were in another place on board and were even bigger boxes. I should say so! And besides that, in one of those big boxes I had a whole bundle of bank-notes stowed away—and now everything is at the bottom of the sea!'

Edevart certainly didn't believe everything he heard, but none the less he nodded his head sadly to show his sympathy.

'Did you ever hear of anything like it!' cried August. 'And now, maybe you're thinking I was insured and got back my ten thousand dollars when I came home? If that's what I were to say, then, as I sit here on this chair, I'd be telling a lie. I was an idiot and didn't insure a thing, —ay, I was a fool and a scoundrel, and I cheated myself. My God!' August spat with disgust for himself—it was as though he had turned his own back on himself and had walked away in disgust. 'And if I had been insured? Then Heaven itself might have fallen down on top of us and I still would have had my money when I got back home. But no, I simply relied upon what luck the Lord might send me, and the Lord sent only a storm and a heavy sea. I had a fine lot of goods in the boxes too, real treasures they were.'

'Was it really such a terrible storm?'

'Bah!' railed August. 'I've been out in lots worse weather than that, honest-to-goodness storms, not such stuff as blows up in a cesspool like the Baltic Sea. The

barometer dropped right down until it looked like six o'clock on your watch. That was warning enough and we began to pull in our sheets. But do you think we had time for that? It was like attacking somebody from ambush without giving him time to jump aside. A hurricane? I don't mind a regular hurricane out in the middle of the ocean with a stout craft under my feet, I don't mind one of those at all. But that one, huh! Inside of a minute both the foremast and the mainmast had snapped, and then we knew we were done for. That's the way it is with one of those six o'clock barometers—your hurricane is on you before you know it. You can't count ten, or even five before he's right around your ears. He's there listening to your counting and then he gets black as night. That's the kind of a hurricane he is and you can't get away from him. *Waitress, give me a trifle more of that meat!* Ay, she understands English. I can just as well eat a bit of food, but it's wasted on me none the less, that's what it is. No, you see, the trouble was that the vessel was rotten. Her guts were weak all the way through; she was loaded down with rye and there wasn't room enough left in her hold to stick a nail in. And there she was with rifts opening in her as long as this room! What the devil kind of a tub was she anyway that couldn't even keep herself around a cargo of rye, and rye as light as a down pillow, you might say. Rescue? — I don't know how you can even talk about our rescuing a thing! We sank like lead; it was like dipping a bucket in the sea. What do you think!—the captain didn't even save his log! There is a fine captain for you! And I hear he's to be getting command of another vessel! All you can say for him is that he didn't leave the deck until the water was up to our knees. "To the boats!" he cried, and we did what he said and got the boats clear. But that was great weather to be taking to the boats in! It was all we could do to keep one of the boats from tearing herself out of the davits

and blowing away out of our hands. We stayed on board the ship as long as we could and didn't jump until we had to or get drowned, for a ship is at least a ship and a boat is nothing at all. I suppose you got my letter?'

Letter? No, Edevart had received no letter.

'I sent you a letter to Fosenland.'

'But I've been up in Lofoten and arrived only last night with a cargo of fish in the sloop.'

August was not listening to his comrade, he was thinking only of his own misfortune. 'All those boxes went to the bottom!' he said. 'And it wasn't much that kept me from going down with them—happy journey to the rest, I wouldn't get into the boat. Even the captain himself was in the boat, but I stayed behind! They pulled me in by main force and I screamed. They thought I'd gone crazy, but it was the others who were crazy—they didn't understand that a boat isn't anything at all. Once I was in a boat and we tipped over and there the sea was alive with sharks! A nigger was bitten right in two! Ay. But they didn't know a thing about that. Right in two he was bitten! I'm scared to death in a boat, but I'm not scared when I'm standing on a deck and nobody can say that I am—but in a boat I am scared to death, and they had to drag me in by main force. If only you had seen how that nigger looked all bitten in two! Right then and there the upper part of him reached for me, the part where he had his arms. But I suppose you're saying to yourself there weren't any sharks in that duck-pond of a Baltic? I never said there were, but I haven't been out in the world without learning something, and one thing I learned was that a boat is nothing at all and that we would have been sucked right down to the bottom just like this beer-glass, if the wind hadn't fallen at that very moment. That's the way it goes with that kind of a hurricane, he quiets right down and all at once the darkness lifts. As soon as it was light again we were rescued by an Esthonian vessel. It's

all right to say that we were saved, but it was our bodies alone that were saved. I had at least ten boxes. And all that good Russian I had learned just so I could talk real Russian when I was selling my stuff—a lot of good that does me now! If I've got a headache, then all I have to say is: "*U mnya balit galavo!*" When I want to sell something, I just bring out my goods and say: "*Chevo vam ugodno?*" And if I can't make a sale—if I have a dirty pup who can't pay me right off like he's supposed to, then I politely say to him: "*Prasyen pasyetitye mnya saftra!*" I tried it on the waitress here but all she knows is English, so I can't talk it with her. And besides, I haven't anything to say anyhow. Such a devilish shame it was: in the Baltic it's fresh water and in the Kattegat it's just like the ocean, but we hadn't even got as far as Cape Skagen! I tell you I've been shipwrecked before and I know all about it. I could give lessons in shipwrecks. But this one! No, the ship was rotten; as soon as her masts broke off, she sank. And now I sit here and have no more fame nor future than you can see with your own eyes. Have you still got that gold ring of yours?'

'Ay. But now you're to have it back,' said Edevart. 'For now, you need it more than I.'

'You're not giving that gold ring of yours away?' objected August, but he took it quickly enough.

Edevart: 'And now we'll go out to get you some new clothes.'

August: 'I wish you would keep still and not be making fun of me. Are you made of money?'

'I'm not exactly penniless.'

Each was moved to emotion by the other and Edevart said: 'I'm not doing a bit more than you'd be doing if you were in my place.'

'Who, me? Stop your nonsense! I've never done you any great favours as far as I know,' protested August. 'But anyway, we've been comrades for many a happy day

and, if I had rescued all those boxes of mine, you would have had a good share of them, and you needn't doubt my word on that. What did you do with the snake ring? You gave it to your sister? But it was too big for her, wasn't it? It's a pity I didn't save out three or four rings set with diamonds for her when I had enough of them to spare!'

They went out into town and purchased new clothes for August and then returned to the sloop. 'It's a lucky thing I could get some decent clothes before that Teodor happened to see me! He'll think now, like as not, that I'm rich,' said August, and he didn't mind boasting a bit in front of Teodor, either; he placed his hand over his vest pocket, as though he had something there and said: 'A single one of my diamonds is worth as much as this whole sloop!'

August's state of mind improved; he had already thought of a plan to give a concert of accordion music in Trondhjem and thus earn a few dollars for himself. If he were to distribute cards and handbills to the effect that he was a shipwrecked Russian, he was sure that droves of people would come to hear him. But what if the Russian consul himself should come to see him and find out he was only a Norwegian? He gave up his concert idea. Later he was taken with the idea of building a hatching-machine like one he had seen in America and buying up about ten thousand eggs to hatch into chickens which he could raise and sell to rich people in the city. At least it seemed that he had begun to use his head again and that was the best thing for him. Now and then he grieved as he called to mind those five or ten boxes of his, however many it was, but he no longer kept harping on the shipwreck.

The sloop *Hermina* was now discharging her cargo and Edevart and his men wandered about with nothing to do. He received a letter from Knoff containing a long list of goods he was to bring home with him in order to save the

cost of transportation. Edevart presented the list to the proper merchant and was idle again. When the sloop was free of her cargo, he went over her and swabbed her clean. He waited for the goods he had ordered, but they did not arrive on board. He inquired about them and the merchant came out with the excuse that his help had not had time. . . .

'Then when will they have time?'

'Let's see now!' said the merchant.

August had been to see the lady who had been unable to pay for the dozen boxes of cigars she had bought the year before. 'She said she was sorry but she couldn't pay me this year either,' said August. 'I couldn't very well go and see her before I got these new clothes and then, even though I knew all the Russian in the world and never had to stop for a word, I couldn't get any money out of her. No, she just wanted to pay for the cigars by being sweethearts with me, and that's the way she is every time I go to see her. It's not such a bad idea, but after all, you can't make a living that way. So I went out and looked on her shelves myself, but my cigars had of course been sold long ago, for they were some of the Czar's own private brand of cigars as you may know. Now I might have been rough and knocked her down, but how could I when she began to kiss me and cry like a child? I didn't have the heart to be harsh with her, and to-day she got the gold ring as well.'

Edevart opened his eyes wide with amazement.

'Ay, it was stupid of me,' said August. 'And I don't wonder that you're mad at me. But what was I to do? And I may be able to make it up some other way. I'm thinking of getting a job in a slaughter-house for a while; I can slaughter animals and skin them as well as anybody, don't worry about that! I learned it out in Australia.'

The goods for Knoff did not arrive; there appeared to be no end of difficulties and Edevart called at the store

again. The merchant apologized that he was busy just at that moment and was unable to talk with him; from certain of his employés, however, Edevart was given a hint or two which he pieced together. Knoff simply could not have all these goods, a large consignment of flour and other groceries, with no further ceremony than that of sending in a list. The merchant had telegraphed Knoff for security to take care of this order and Knoff had referred him to the large business house which had purchased his cargo of fish. All that was very well, but the business house would not stand security for such an enormous order as this—the fish had already been more than paid for by large advances of money Knoff had received from the house; and it was a question whether the schooner's cargo would be able to balance even these obligations.

What in the name of Heaven! A sudden suspicion lay thumping in Edevart's mind—was Knoff beginning to totter! It was beyond understanding.

But in the meantime Knoff must certainly have straightened things out with a loan or some sort of arrangement; Edevart received orders to get the list back from the first merchant and take it over to an entirely different merchant and get the goods from him. This he did. The new merchant bowed and scraped and hinted that Knoff was good enough for him! He sent the goods aboard at once. So probably enough, the whole affair had been nothing but a stupid misunderstanding.

The sloop was now making ready to sail. But what was to be done about August? Up until now he had had food and lodging aboard, but now the sloop was sailing and August would be no better off than before.

'If only it weren't so far off to India,' said Edevart, for he had truly believed those tales of India he had heard from August during those early days of their comradeship.

But these had become hazy and distant in August's own

mind by now and he asked: 'To India? Why do you want to go there?'

'Not I, but you, didn't you leave quite a bit of wealth back there?'

'Oh, yes!' cried August, remembering. 'And I'll have to be skipping back there one of these days to see about those chests of mine, too. I lost my keys for them in the shipwreck, but I guess I can pick the locks, all right. At least twelve keys there were! What was I going to say? Oh, yes, there's a high-class gentleman here who wants to write up all the experiences I've had out in the world—I'm to tell him things and then he'll write them down. I met him on one of the docks and sat talking with him for quite a while. "I'll think it over," I told him. I never saw such a man for writing, though I've been around the world. No matter how fast I talk, he writes down all I say. He says it will make a whole book with my picture in it and everything. We went to see a publisher yesterday to see if he wanted to publish it and he said he would think it over. We'd make heaps of money out of it, this writing fellow tells me, and I myself would go out and sell the books by the thousand every place I go. "Well, we'll see if it turns out like that," I told him. "Why shouldn't we make something out of it?" said the writing fellow. "We could do it just as well as Gjest Baardsen who sold a big book that described all the robberies he had committed?" I don't know, Edevart: what do you think?'

Edevart didn't understand a word of it; he could neither read nor write very well and books belonged to a world far removed from his own; he shook his head at books. But he had grown hair on his chest and now he scented danger; he advised his comrade to be careful and not tell too many things, for he might be getting himself into trouble and have to go to prison for life.

'Pshaw!' said August. That would never happen; he was no fool! The thought of this book he was to help write

interested him keenly, especially since his picture would be in it to make it attractive and would circulate through town and country. Then people back home in Polden and elsewhere, too, could then see where he had journeyed, and all the girls who had made fun of him in their day would be made properly ashamed of themselves—in short, the book would bring him no small fame.

But in the course of the same evening, August thought the matter over more carefully and concluded that he would turn down the proposition. How easy it would be for that writing fellow to drag out of him some little confession or other which would later prove dangerous to him! And if ever it escaped his lips, there it would stand on the printed page. And then there would be his picture, a convenience for every policeman in the world. No, thanks, he was no man's fool!

August began again to turn things over in his mind, to lay plans and give them up, to think out one way after another of making a living, and at length he decided to turn to the sea again. He wasn't completely discouraged and Edevart must never think he was; a man of his calibre could find a berth aboard ship any time he liked, there was no doubt of that. But this time he'd see to it that he sailed on a regular ocean and not the Baltic Sea, that's certain! Would Edevart be able to lend him a few dollars? For he wanted to ship out of Bergen.

A few dollars? Of course. But couldn't he just as well ship here out of Trondhjem?

O yes, perhaps. But according to his latest plan, August wanted first of all to go out in the country and spend the winter working on a farm.

Great changes at Knoff's trading station. Edevart brought the sloop up alongside a monstrous stone pier equipped with hoisting apparatus and other machinery, with railroad tracks running in to both of the warehouses.

The place was still teeming with men and horses completing their construction work. A powerful swinging crane lifted a dozen sacks of flour at a time up from the hold of the sloop, and the men chuckled to see it all so quickly and easily done.

Knoff came down to the sloop, nodded in a friendly fashion to Edevart, but was busy as ever giving orders to many people. Coil up that rope there! Roll all those barrels away; the sloop is here with a cargo of goods—pile them here!

He turned to Edevart and asked: 'Did you pass the schooner last night? No? Then he must have taken a different course. You haven't any idea where he is, have you? I suppose he's still anchored off his drying ground.'

'That's not at all unlikely,' answered Edevart. 'All the vessels north of us were still at their drying-grounds when I sailed!' He swelled with pride, for he had realized by the tone of voice the Chief used, that old Skipper Norem ought not to have let himself be outdistanced by a mere beginner and a lad.

'That was a lot of nonsense you had to put up with in Trondhjem,' said Knoff. 'But I taught that merchant a lesson, all right. He could have had that large order of mine himself, but he acted in such a way that I had no choice but to go to his competitor. And you had no trouble at all at the other place, did you?'

'No,' answered Edevart. 'Everything was fine. He almost bowed himself in two for me!' Edevart laughed as he spoke.

But he realized at once that he shouldn't have given way to his amusement; the Chief frowned and asked: 'How many pieces of freight have you?'

'Thirty-seven, not counting the two hundred sacks of flour.'

'And how many do you have in your crew?'

'Two men. They were taken on up north.'

'Discharge them and let them go home if they like. But if they prefer to remain over and see what a large trading station looks like, tell them I have nothing against it. When you have finished discharging your freight, you are free for the rest of the day. To-morrow you will bring the accounts and what cash you have left to my office.'

Knoff walked away.

This was simply loftiness and silly bravado on the part of the Chief! Edevart had returned from a long and important expedition, and he would not have raised his hand to do a bit of work to-day even if he had been so ordered; he wanted to go and see his acquaintances and enjoy something of the respect they ought to be feeling for him as a young skipper. The cash? Was the Chief expecting to get a box full of money perhaps? A few coins were left over, but cash? —No!

He paid off Teodor and Ezra, who both wanted to stay over until the following morning and sleep aboard that night. Edevart discharged his cargo, talked with people he knew and went ashore to watch the masons at work and to have a look at the plans. One last section of the dock was all that remained unfinished. The masons sang as they lifted the blocks of stone, like sailor lads hoisting their sails with a song they were—bursting with gladness just to be alive. However, Edevart could not help but notice how generally depressed Knoff's regular work people were; something was the matter with them, something mysterious, something oppressive. The foreman of the warehouse looked timidly about and said: 'Ay, great changes have come since the last time you were here!' He shook his grey head.

A young fellow spoke up in answer to this. 'There's sure to be some way out of it!'

The foreman, meaningly: 'Ay, and well there may be for you young lads who are going to America. But as for me, I'm too old for that.'

Edevart strolled up to the house where the cooper lived and had a little talk with him. The cooper was idle and had nothing more to do than to potter around a bit with his farm work. 'Ay, great changes hereabouts,' said the cooper like the rest. 'God knows whether it's all for the best or not. Won't you come in the house?'

'I'd be taking you away from your work?'

The cooper smiled. 'From my important farm work? Oh no. And there is no other kind of work for me now. The cooperage has shut down.'

'Shut down?'

'Many of the work places here have been shut down. The boat carpenter's shop has been shut down, too, and the men are going off to America. Soon the bakery will shut down.'

'No, I brought in two hundred sacks of flour,' said Edevart.

'Well, the baker may go on baking for a while, but his place will shut down before long. Flour isn't all that's needed, money for wages is also needed. The tutor for the children has left.'

It was now clear enough to Edevart that Knoff was in some sort of difficulty; that haughty look on his face down on the pier had been nothing but a pose assumed for the benefit of those he encountered. 'And now that he has a dock,' said the cooper, 'What is he going to do with it? A powerful piece of masonry with machines and apparatus to load or discharge a cargo in three shakes. But in spite of that the steamers don't call here.'

What did Edevart think the dock had cost? A monstrous amount! Just think of how much construction work had been involved from the time the first stone was laid until now—the enormous expenditure of ready cash every single Saturday! Knoff's general business was divided into many branches so that one branch could relieve another when too much strain was put upon it. But here

was an undertaking which had drained heavily upon his ready money all summer long and Knoff's general business was not so well able to stand the strain as had been expected.

'Then where did he get the money?'

'I can't tell you about that. Borrowed it? Put a mortgage on the trading station? It's sad indeed to think of. And I say what I have always said: what did he want with a dock? He just wanted to show off and see how grand he could be! He wanted to have the mail steamers toot right outside his door! But they won't come to him for all his goings-on.'

'Won't they come to him?'

'No. For now the regular steamer stop has also put up a dock.'

'You don't tell me!'

'We hadn't so much as got the foundation laid here, when things began to stir down there. And it didn't trouble them a bit, either; they have been saving for many years and are rich and can afford it, and they built of wood, of timber, and that's not very expensive. To strengthen the framework they bought some worn-out rails from the Støren Railroad and paid scrap-iron prices for them. Oh, they are clever and cautious folk down there, they don't bite off more than they can chew —that dock of theirs was finished long ago. It's but an eighth as large as ours, but it does them some good, for the steamers use it.'

'But after all, can you understand why in the world the steamers don't make this their landing place?' asked Edevart. 'For this is certainly the right place for it.'

'No, not as long as that one particular director has anything to say about it. . . . When it comes down to the fine point, they don't like Knoff. He is high and mighty with them, he laughs at them. Of course this is where the steamer landing really ought to be and every-

body knows it. We are a large and busy place surrounded on three sides by a well peopled district. But there's no use talking about that. As long as the steamship company has that one particular director . . . ay, for he's offended now—Knoff must have laughed at him in some large meeting or other some time ago . . .'

The cooper at length hinted that he would have to be leaving the place before long. It wasn't because he wanted to go, for he had lived here so many years, had his house and home here and his little plot of ground. 'What else was I going to say? Oh, yes, the people from Doppen have been here a couple of times and asked after you.'

'That crazy fellow, I suppose he was drunk again?'

'It was his wife. They are trying to get over to America, I hear; they've been to Knoff to ask for ticket money and offered him that little farm place of theirs as security. But Knoff needs all the money he can lay his hands on for himself.'

'What did they want of me in such a matter?'

'I couldn't tell you.'

Edevart thought deeply after he had left the cooper; it was a question now whether Knoff would be able to settle up with him for what he had earned! Think of it, it was true then, that Knoff was in a tight place! That unlucky dock had ruined him! It was Edevart who had given Knoff the idea to build a dock and, although he had not expected to receive any particular appreciation for his help, he might once have thrown out his chest and felt his own importance. But now he didn't dare even hint as to the part he had played—the ones who had been affected by the disaster would surely make trouble for him. It was a terrible situation and he wished only that he were far away!

He ran across the housekeeper, Jomfru Ellingsen, a

sweetheart of his after a fashion, that lively, brown-eyed girl who had been more than friendly with him on several occasions; she seemed the only cheerful and plucky person in the place now and she talked and laughed and expressed glowing admiration for his accomplishment. To think that he had succeeded! And that he had returned alive! The Chief himself had had words of praise to say about him at the luncheon table one day last week. Edevart did not object to hearing this sort of thing, and so when he entered the bakery shortly afterward, he called out loudly to his old room-mate: 'That's right, work hard! I brought you two hundred sacks of flour to play with!'

'H'm,' said the baker gloomily. 'That won't last us very long.'

Well, well, here was the baker gloomy as the rest. His wages had been reduced and he had unemployment staring him in the face; he had it in mind to make a little trip down to Trondhjem toward the close of the week to have a look around, for he'd be damned if he would remain on the deck of a sinking ship!

Wherever Edevart went, he found folk dark and depressed; even the children who clung to him and followed him around had become quieter in their ways—ay, even the boy, Romeo, although he was free of his tutor and no longer had lessons to prepare.

Edevart called in at the store. 'You brought us fresh goods,' they said to him. Yes, here was something at least to cheer the poor lads up, although they, too, had had their wages reduced. 'It will be fun to have the shelves and bins full again,' they said. But Head-clerk Lorensen, who could see farther into the future, simply shook his head. He, too, had begun to think of America, and why not? There was nothing else for him to do. Edevart advised him rather to find a place right here at home and start up a

business of his own, but the other rejected the notion; he didn't have enough money—such a project would require capital!

It was as though no one knew how to adjust himself to lower wages and a simpler standard of living, so accustomed had they become to a life of prosperity. They were filled with a hopeless dissatisfaction; the devil himself couldn't live on such miserable wages—why not America, then? Everything seemed topsy-turvy, unfamiliar; folks had earned good money before and they were in no mood to be earning less now. Why couldn't their prosperity continue? The building of one dock ought not to be enough to make beggars of them all. Head store-clerk Lorensen expressed it thus: 'We are getting out of the country, and that's all there is to it; we have become uneasy in our minds and we are giving in to our uneasiness. So we are all going off together to settle in America. You, too, will soon be chasing after us, just wait!' said he, turning to Edevart.

But that would be the last thing to enter Edevart's mind. Never!

'Then what will you do?' asked Lorensen. 'Are you thinking of sailing off to Lofoten with the sloop to spend another winter there? Maybe you will, providing the sloop isn't sold in the meantime along with everything else, only keep what I say to yourself!'

It was barely possible that Lorensen was right; he was thoroughly familiar with Knoff's business and was therefore in a position to draw his own conclusions. But, in any case, he didn't know Edevart! America? Not while he was in his right mind! He had never given it a moment's consideration and he never would.

On the following morning Edevart took leave of his crew. Ezra was no longer brave—when he stretched out his tough little hand, he was unable to utter the proper

words of farewell, his lips were trembling so shamefully.

'H'm!' said he, bending over. 'This shoe of mine pinches like the devil!' But he had received excellent wages for his summer's work and now had a good bit of money in his pocket and that soon cheered him up.

'Happy journey home!' Edevart wished him and added: 'I may be coming along myself before a great while!'

Edevart went up to the office with his accounts and his cash, and how small was the amount of that cash! But how could one expect more? He had paid for the fish in Lofoten and paid off the ledge-people in Polden; and then there were his provisions, the wages of his crew, as well as other extra expenses, such as towage in and out of Polden and the purchase of necessary sail-equipment in Trondhjem. And too, there were those decidedly more private amounts discreetly scattered here and there throughout the book under the guise of various postings and therefore well concealed, none the less swelling the account. How could one expect the cash left over to be more?

A little grimace of impatience crossed Knoff's face when Edevart knocked and entered the room. Perhaps this was only his favourite pose: the busy business man with no time for petty affairs. But then, too, it might have been that he was expecting an unpleasant accounting and a small return of cash.

'Maybe it would be better if I came to you later?' suggested Edevart.

'No. My head-secretary will look over your accounting directly. You may leave the cash with me. Is this the cash you are returning!' he exclaimed, glancing first at the small number of bank-notes and silver coins and then at Edevart.

'Ay, that's what I'm returning. Exactly what I have left.'

'From all that money? From the amounts you received from Norem to buy fish with as well as the thousand I later sent you for drying?'

Edevart had learned to wriggle out of a difficulty; he had learned it from many folk—from August, from old Papst, from Skipper Norem, from everyone he knew. He took offence and said: 'This is what is left from the total amount I was given—you can look it up in the book.'

Knoff was silent for a time; he thumbed through the book, turned the pages back and forth, paused over the final entries and asked: 'But in any case all wages are paid?'

Edevart: 'Ay, all wages. Except my own.'

'Haven't you taken your own wages out?'

'How could I? I didn't know what my wages were to be, did I?'

'What they were to be? Oh, yes, we were entirely agreed upon that: ordinary sea-man's wages, I told you.'

'Ay, but that was before you made me the skipper.'

'Skipper!' said Knoff, wagging his head with a pitying smile.

This took Edevart down a peg, but still he managed to say: 'Anyway, I had the responsibility.'

'All right,' answered Knoff indulgently. 'We can, of course, say that if we like, but after all, isn't it really I who have had the responsibility?'

'And I didn't do so badly by you, either!' mumbled Edevart.

Knoff remained silent.

Suddenly Edevart asked: 'How much are you paying Norem?'

'Skipper Norem of the schooner? Why do you ask about that? It is quite a different matter where he is concerned. He has worked his way up in my employ and has earned more and more each voyage.'

'H'm,' said Edevart and nodded, his lips pressed tightly together.

Knoff, tersely: 'No, it will be according to our agreement—ordinary sea-man's wages. Thus you have six months; going on seven months' pay coming to you. But then, there's the fishing-gear!'

Edevart, embittered by this trick on the part of the Chief: 'That wasn't fishing-gear, it was only an old herring-seine. Did you want money for that?'

'I'll have my head-secretary look up what it cost me and let you know the price later on. An old herring-seine? Wasn't that the seine that made the big haul up North? I read about it in the papers.'

'And what if it was?' said Edevart. 'For me it was not much of a seine and I gave it away without thinking twice about it.'

Knoff thumbed in the book. 'I notice that the sloop is unpainted,' said he.

'I didn't have time to paint her up.'

'But I see by the book here that you are charging wages for two men for the entire summer. What did these men have to do, since they couldn't even manage to scrape and paint the vessel?'

Edevart was silent for a moment. Here was one of the most delicate points in his account and he had no illusions as to that. He had by no means had two men aboard ship during the past summer, he had been entirely alone on the sloop, right up to the final month when he took Ezra aboard to do the cooking. But he had entered in his account a full summer's wages for two men and withdrawn this money into his own pocket. Edevart had often weighed this act over in his mind. Was it so very wrong of him to have done it? He had certainly done worse things than that! Hadn't he gone the whole summer there aboard the sloop and lived on dried meat and coffee simply to save the wages of a cook, meanwhile taking

this money for himself? And as far as the second man was concerned, all the vessels up North carried one extra man beside the skipper; if Edevart could do all the work himself, he was entitled to the money he had saved. The single mistake he had made was his failure to have had the sloop scraped and painted, a mere trifle, a mere nothing-at-all. Didn't it make any difference that the sloop *Hermina* on her voyage south was all of two or three weeks ahead of the other fishing vessels and thus had saved her owner many dollars?

'The fact is,' said Edevart, 'that I had to have a man on board all the time—or didn't you want me to have decent food to put in my mouth? So he did the cooking, kept the place in order and stood watch to relieve me—the usual custom on board. And as for the other man, I had necessary work for him at one end of the drying-ground while I was at the other end. We worked and slaved; there were hardly any men-folk to be found to help us, only women-folk and youngsters on the ledges, so the two of us had our hands full to keep things going. And then one day the sea rose up so big and terrible that the flood-tide reached right up to where the fish were and almost carried them away. How do you think I could have managed alone? I didn't dare risk it.'

Knoff merely sat and was silent. Edevart had come into his stride and continued: 'But since you are figuring that the sloop wasn't scraped and painted, I can just as well cut off half a month's wages, if you say so. And if you really think I didn't accomplish anything to speak of last summer, why, you can give me what you please.'

A telegram was brought in. Knoff opened it and jumped up from his chair. It contained a serious message: the schooner had foundered. . . .

Edevart later came to the conclusion that it is an ill wind which blows no good. What was that he had seen in the Chief's face at the moment he was reading the tele-

gram about the shipwreck? The Chief spoke but a word or two: it was a tragedy, vessel and cargo at the bottom of the sea, a smash and a crash, ruin! But his face betrayed no worry, quite the contrary. Knoff did what he had never done before, he permitted himself to be chatty with Edevart. 'Can you understand how he steered that schooner straight down to the bottom of the sea?' he asked, jokingly. 'She filled with water and sank. He must be getting pretty old, that Norem; I wouldn't be surprised if he's getting foolish in the head, ha-ha-ha—a grand old man, naturally, but an ass for all that! Don't you think so? And I had thought seriously that next year I would send the schooner directly into the Baltic—I have so much trouble with those middlemen down in Trondhjem, you see—really, it's quite amusing. Well, that's the end of that idea; it sank with the schooner. Where did it happen? A little way north of Villa Light, the message states. Well, anyway it was lucky that the crew were saved. At least, then, old Norem hasn't human life on his conscience. What was I going to say? Take a man with you and go out at once and freshen up the sloop. I won't have her lying in that new dock in her present filthy condition. Not to be thought of. . .'

If only the Chief had called a halt there! thought Edevart later. But what he did was to wax almost confidential with a few final words. What did it mean? Had the shipwreck really affected him so little that he could turn indifferently to other matters? 'You didn't sail in past the steamer landing yesterday when you came, did you?' he asked of Edevart. 'Then you don't know that they built a dock as well? You ought to take a trip over there and have a look at it.'

'Ay, that I will.'

'Simply a wooden pier,' said Knoff. 'Merely a few timbers spiked together. . .'

It was the opinion of the cooper and all the others that

the Chief would profit considerably as the result of the shipwreck. It depended upon the amount of insurance he had placed upon the schooner and her cargo, but, unless they were mistaken about the Chief, he had certainly insured them both for double their actual value, if for no other reason than to appear grand; it wasn't in his mind to appear as the owner of a mediocre vessel and a light cargo. His inescapable egotism had at last brought him good results; no, he was not complaining, he ordered everyone back to work and paid them all on Saturday.

A miracle it was! A miracle that Knoff had apparently regained his power, that his warehouses again stood bursting with flour and that his store was no longer a thing of empty shelves! And his own revival affected not only the trading station itself but the district round about. Folk became more cheerful and renewed hope shone out of their eyes.

Edevart didn't have time to take close notice of the change which had come over the place—he was so busy at his work of freshening up the sloop that he spent even his nights aboard. But one night his helper, a young lad, came to him with the news that once again there would be dancing in the servants' quarters. Wouldn't Edevart like to go ashore? Haakon Doppen was in town and would play.

Edevart did not dare ask the question he had on his tongue; experience had made him wise and he affected no interest in going ashore to mingle with the dancers. By no means, for it would only result in another fight! He realized he would have to be careful of what he said to the lad concerning the lady from Doppen, for he did not wish to be misunderstood; but concerning Haakon, he could speak out freely enough. Well, well, so Haakon Doppen was in town? He had come with that knapsack of his to get some supplies to take home, had he? When

had he come? This morning? Then he was pretty well drunk by this time, naturally!

'No,' answered the lad. 'For he hasn't anything left to buy drinks with now.'

Edevart had to ask after Lovisa Margreta, of course he had to do that! But he certainly called her by another name than that one, in order that he might not appear particularly interested in her. 'Was Haakon alone, or did he bring one of the children along?' he asked.

The lad: 'I don't know.'

'I was wondering whether he's taking up with that red-headed girl from last year again, Severina, I believe she was called.'

'Ho!' cried the boy and looked at him. 'He's with his wife.'

Edevart remained on board. He had made a fool of himself long enough; once upon a time he would have been willing to give up his life for her, but now he had decided to be a grown-up man—let that be understood! How he had bungled his affairs, floundering back and forth between Polden and Fosenland! She actually meant less to him than a single bush back home. She had two children, but these were nothing to him! Moreover, she was married—

The hours passed and he lit his lamp. He did not dare walk about on deck, for then they would see him from the road and have their own opinion as to what was making him so restless. Still more hours passed; the night began to drag and he was no longer in a mood to keep himself imprisoned in his own cabin. Of course, he dared walk about on deck! Why not, pray? It was his own ship and he could even tramp loudly with his heels on the planking if he liked. But never had hours passed so slowly and never had that expensive watch of his gone at such a snail's pace, although he tramped, tramped,

tramped on the deck! Shall we go ashore and take a stroll up past the station? No, I said no!

He settled down in his cabin again and prepared to take a nap.

The sound of feet above on deck. He might easily have pretended that he had not expected this sound of feet. So he did pretend, and appeared surprised. Who could it be who had come aboard so late? But oh, yes, he had expected her, all right! Hadn't she been to see the cooper and asked after him!

When she came down the stairs and stepped in, he was surprised only that there was no hurry about her—she did not appear to have stolen her way to him. She gave him her hand in greeting and entreated him to pardon her coming. 'Haven't you been in bed yet?' she asked sympathetically.

He feigned huge surprise over her visit and she didn't wonder that he was surprised, said she. She drew forth a piece of paper from the bosom of her dress and held it in her hand.

First she remarked about him, that he had become quite a man; that he certainly must be the youngest skipper in the whole country. She looked about her and thought that his quarters were cosy indeed; he kept his cabin so neat—Why, even his lamp-chimney was polished!

'Aren't you afraid to come here?' he asked.

'No,' she replied.

She was so gentle and quiet; it was a year now since he had lived with her up at Doppen. She seemed even sweeter now than she had then, her mouth was more tender now as it trembled slightly. What was he to say? He asked after the children, a little later he took her in his arms and kissed her. She let herself be kissed as in the past, frankly and from the goodness of her heart. 'Lovisa Margreta!' he whispered.

She really had a reason for coming, she said, and she hoped he would hear what it was. Naturally he had known all along what she wanted of him, but he had occasionally given way to dreams that it was something different: that she wanted to leave Doppen and come to him, remain with him, live and die with him. Wild dreams—now she was asking him to help her and her family to get over to America! She told him how things stood: that it would be a very great favour to them; they had asked Knoff and everyone else, but in vain. But there was no one on earth who had been so nice to her as Edevart had; he would be given ample security, too. Look here at this paper—they would fill it out in the morning and then they would both sign their names to it, both Haakon and she; they would do everything that was necessary. Things had gone so badly for them; Haakon had learned tin-smithing during that time he was gone from home and now he could make the prettiest things from tin, such as sieves and cups and dippers; but all they could do with them once they were finished was to hang them up on their own kitchen wall, for no one ever came to Doppen to buy things, they lived so far away. Ay, things had gone badly for them. And no one in the world had been as nice to her as Edevart.

She had uttered all this in one long breath as though she were afraid he would interrupt her with an immediate refusal. And now he must decide it. She took his hand in hers.

He could not help feeling flattered by her taking him for such a rich and powerful fellow, but nevertheless he shook his head over what he had heard.

'You couldn't do it?' she asked.

'No.'

'Then that's all there is to be said,' she whispered and, with these words, she gave up and withdrew into herself.

He asked: 'Why can't you go on as you have before,

you weaving and he—but he's never done anything, has he?'

'That's because everyone knows him here, they know all about him. Every single person he meets knows just what happened to him. And then when you stop to think he did it all for my sake and was innocent after all! But no one ever does stop to think of that. And now he feels it will be better for him if we go off to a place where he doesn't know a soul—he'd be entirely changed. For he's no coward—'

'I left a crowbar behind at Doppen. Has he been using that and clearing all those stones that lay out in your hay-field?'

Silence.

'Has he used that crowbar, I asked you?'

'No, for now he has learned something else, and if he could only get away and go to a new country—'

Edevart had an idea. 'Then let him set out alone.'

In spite of her helplessness, Lovisa Margreta kept her wits about her. Edevart's suggestion was impossible. Humbly and virtuously, she said: 'It is simply that Haakon wants to have me and the children with him, for we are married and have to share life together. That's the way it is, isn't it? And without us, it would be hard for him to keep out of trouble.'

Edevart, with a double meaning in his words: 'Ay, but it might be hard for others, too, without you. But you aren't worrying much about that, I see.'

'I am, I am, I am!' she cried out and bent over him affectionately. 'I am very unhappy for your sake and I don't see whatever we shall do. Tell me what I'm to do!'

Edevart repeated: 'You can let him set out alone and you stay behind!'

Long silence.

'What would happen then?' she whispered and shook

her head. 'It would be very wrong of me, you know, and we would never be able to hide it. No, it isn't to be thought of.'

Edevart: 'Then what you want me to do is to help you to get away from me?'

After a pause: 'I don't understand it at all,' she moaned in despair.

He undid one of the buttons of her blouse and she did not prevent him from doing so; but when he tried to unfasten a second one, she kissed him tenderly and moved away from him.

'Haven't you time?' he asked.

'Oh, no. For you see he knows where I am.'

'What!' cried Edevart. 'He knows you are out here with me!'

'Ay, he asked me himself to come to you. Oh, he isn't as bad as you think.'

'It seems he is worse than I thought,' answered Edevart, confused.

Lovisa Margreta: 'No, it's just that he is so downhearted; we can't get help anywhere and we are willing to give up Doppen in exchange—see, here it is on paper, if you'll only stop to read it. He told me to come and see if you would help us. And he never thought that—anything else—'

'It's all the same to me what he thought! What's that?'

'I don't know.'

A sound on the deck above, a cautious footstep. Lovisa Margreta listens, her face filled with alarm; Edevart is indifferent to the noise. He continues: 'No, you don't like me at all any more!'

'I do, I do! I'm in love with you. There's some one there on deck.'

'All you want is to go off with him. That's all you want to do.'

'But what else am I to do? It isn't so easy for me either, three children and everything—'

'Is it three children you have now?'

She answered with eyes downcast: 'Ay. But the last one isn't his!'

Although the scraping of feet above on the deck had become more noticeable and might after all mean danger, he was far more interested in the last words she had spoken and he answered with renewed hope in his voice: 'How do you know the last one isn't his?'

She, with a far-away smile on her lips: 'Oh, I know it well enough!'

This gave him something to think about. An expression of anger crossed his face when the sound of a fingernail scraping against the skylight above disturbed him. Impatiently he cried out: 'Hey, you, up there, get out!'

'Who is it?' whispered Lovisa Margreta.

'It makes no difference who it is, she's got to get out!'

'She? Is it some one who wants to come to you?'

'I don't know. I suppose it's Jomfru Ellingsen.'

'Jomfru Ellingsen?'

'I'll go up and find out. Sit still here so she can't see you.'

He went up on deck and stood face to face with Haakon Doppen.

Haakon whispered a word of greeting. 'I only wanted—,' said he. 'Is she still here? I'm sorry about last year—here is my hand on it.'

Edevart was greatly surprised to observe how changed the man was; he stood there like a beggar, a poor unfortunate, begging. From a distance Edevart could detect the smell of *brændevin.*

'What do you want?' asked Edevart.

'What do I want? Is she still here? I only wanted to help her ask you. But for God's sake don't tell her I was here! I didn't want her to be alone when she asked you;

it would be so hard for her alone, so I came. I'll be up in the servants' quarters playing for the dance until she gets back. We are in such terrible trouble; please help us to get away! You can have the whole of Doppen just as it stands. Have you read how we wanted to make out the papers? You won't regret it; she'll bring you the papers to-morrow morning early. Don't for God's sake tell her I was here; tell her it was some one else. And now I'll be going back right off. I just sneaked away for a moment or two. Your pardon for last year, I tell you. Here's my hand!'

He quickly scrambled back on the pier and disappeared.

'That drunken fool, he only wanted to see if I was undressed!' thought Edevart and returned below.

'Three children now?' he asked. 'Was it three children you said you have now?'

'Ay,' she replied.

'When did you have it?'

She mentioned the day and the month, but she made no great fuss about it, for she did not wish to make use of this fact against him. She was more concerned about who it had been up on deck. 'Did you drive her away?' she asked.

'Ay, I made—her go away.'

'I was so frightened,' whispered Lovisa Margreta. 'I was thinking of hiding myself in your bunk. So she comes to you out here!'

'Ay, that was the thing to do,' said he. 'You should have crept into my bunk!'

She disregarded this remark and asked further about Jomfru Ellingsen. Was she in the habit of coming at night? Did she come often? Not a trace of bitterness lay in her words, she merely bowed her head thoughtfully. He said no to all her questions. Jomfru Ellingsen must have had some reason for coming to-night, for she had

never come before. 'Come now, Lovisa Margreta, won't you get undressed? Look here, nice white pillows—'

She continued to sit pensively and did not even follow him with her eyes.

'All right then,' said he impatiently. 'You don't want anything at all but to get away from me.'

'Away from you?' she cried. 'No, I want to stay with you as long as I live, that's what I want. Heavens above, you don't understand—'

Oh, how sorry he felt for himself. When he gave in and agreed to help her leave the country, he was unable to recognize either himself or his own voice. Oh, yes, he had thought it over; it would be a sore tragedy for him, but she didn't care anything about that. All right, have it her way then! He would be the underdog, but he would help her, would give her all the money he had to his name. Was she satisfied with that?

'Oh,' she moaned, throwing herself into his arms. He could feel how her breast was heaving and how intensely she kissed him, far more warmly now than before. She bubbled with numberless small expressions of gratitude and called him by many a pet name: 'Sweetheart, my own dear lad, God bless you!'

Taking advantage of this delightfully explosive moment, he attempted a further advance by unfastening one more button of her blouse. This promptly made her feel unhappy and she began to cry. Surprised and angry, he pushed her away from him and said: 'All right, have your own way!'

'No, no, I'll do anything you tell me to!' she cried. 'If only you'll be so good as to help us to get away!'

So that was it!

'I told you I would help you!' said he curtly. 'Look here, you can have all of my money!' He took out his wallet and slapped the whole bundle of bank-notes it con-

tained down on the table. 'Count them yourself, if you like!'

'No—How much is it?'

'Count them yourself, I said!'

'No, no, Edevart! God bless you, how much is it?'

He mentioned the sum.

'Heavens above!' she cried out with that old familiar expression of hers. 'I shall thank you and give praise for your name to my dying day! It is more than we expected to get for Doppen. But how can you afford to give away all your money? Look, won't you keep some of it for yourself?'

'Take the money, I say!' he ordered harshly.

And now did he expect a little show of affection from her? He waited for it some time, but it failed to materialize. Instead, she handed him a paper to read. He threw it down on the table. Then she promised to bring him the proper document early the following morning.

'I don't care anything about that!' he said and continued to wait.

And then she understood what lay in his mind. She began to remove her clothes, weeping as she did so.

'What are you crying for? You didn't cry about it that time before!' he said.

'No, I'm not crying,' she said. 'See, I'm taking off my clothes. In just a minute I'll—'

More and more she cried; her tears were falling to the floor, but nevertheless she tried to make it appear that she was willing, eager. . .

Edevart got up, hurt to the very quick, and roughly threw her clothes back around her, gripped her arm and raised her up. 'Take the money and get out!' he said. 'I certainly don't want to harm you!'

She tried to put him back in a good mood by chattering tender words to him, but he tramped angrily up the

stairs ahead of her. When they came out where it was dark, fervently she said: 'Edevart, I couldn't!'

'You couldn't?'

'No, not to-night. I'm so sorry about it.'

'Couldn't you? So you had it all fixed that way before you came?'

'No,' she said. 'I didn't want to; it was Haakon who wanted me to do it that way. But I regret it.'

Edevart, at length: 'Why didn't you say so before?'

She: 'No, for—it was so light down there.'

CHAPTER TEN

LATE autumn was at hand; Edevart had finished painting the sloop and was back helping in the store. The good business had lasted for a short time, but as soon as the shelves and bins had become empty again and showed no signs of being replenished, any one could see that Knoff had about reached the end of his rope.

True, the dock was now complete and all the workmen and horses had gone, but this only served to emphasize the emptiness of the place—it cheered no one. Head store-clerk Lorensen had already left Knoff's service and was doing everything in his power to get ready for his voyage to America; he hoped to be able to leave before the beginning of winter. He was taking two of the store lads with him. Out in the village a large number of the young men were making preparations for America; there would be a whole party of them, a regular colony of them—even the family from Doppen were to be part of the expedition.

America-fever it was!

Knoff made fun of this malady, said it was idiotic and ridiculous and that these vagabonds would themselves one day come to regret this adventure of theirs. But no one any longer paid attention to Knoff; folk had lost all their respect for him—even old Skipper Norem on his return home shook his head over the downfall of the Chief. 'He went too far when he built that dock,' he said. 'And I don't suppose that even the wrecking of the schooner will do him a bit of good.'

A general disintegration and discomfort had afflicted

that large and important trading centre and only the Chief himself seemed to have escaped its worst poisons. The dock had ruined him, but he was still alive and could breathe. The head book-keeper had been dismissed, the baker would be leaving at Christmas time and now even the housekeeper, Jomfru Ellingsen, would have to get along with one girl less than formerly.

Edevart was wretched and wished himself away from the place. He felt poor and forlorn; his wallet lay flat in his pocket, and he had given away not only his own money but money belonging to his brother as well; it wouldn't be long either, before Joakim would be asking for it back. Of course Edevart had received Doppen in exchange for the money—he had the bill of sale and the deed for it in his pocket—but Joakim would hardly be able to understand this transaction of his; Edevart could hardly understand it himself. Doppen, what was he going to do with the place now that he had it? Before, perhaps, but now—?

The great day arrived when the emigrants were to set sail for America. They gathered down on the pier and left in a big boat which was to take them as far as the steamer landing. The future Americans were all more or less burdened with baggage; Haakon Doppen was loaded down with luggage and besides all this he had a wife and three children, but most of all he was solicitous about certain bags upon which he warned people not to sit—they contained tinware which he was going to try to sell in Trondhjem. There were fourteen men and five women in the party; ay, and many children; the boat was loaded to capacity.

Edevart was purposely absent when the voyagers took leave; he stood on the road which led to the warehouses and waited until he saw the boat well out in the bay, before he slowly walked down to the pier. Out on the boat a woman stood up and waved to him and Edevart

waved back. But his spirit was dull, and it really made little difference to him that she was going away.

On the pier stood Knoff and Skipper Norem. Edevart was amazed at the Chief's willingness to appear, but that, he supposed, was because Knoff considered it ill-fitting his dignity to hide his face, a thing he must never do! Turning on his heel, the Chief walked away; over his shoulder he remarked: 'I'm going to set up two large beacons here on the pier so that the ships can find their way in at night!'

Norem shook his head as he watched him go. Turning to Edevart, the Skipper said he was afraid that the Chief's reason was beginning to waver. 'You heard what he said, that he was going to set up two large beacons here on the pier? He's quite capable of that bit of craziness, too! Just think of the money it will cost! And only a moment ago he was asking me to endorse a note for him.'

'Oh! That can't be a fact?'

'Yes, what do you think of that! The owner must come to the skipper!'

'Did you do it for him?'

Skipper Norem: 'Did I promise to endorse his note, do you mean? No. I'm not crazy. If I had, I might just as well have gone off to America with the others! As it is, I still have enough to keep me here at home for the rest of my life, thank God!'

'That's more than I can say,' mumbled Edevart.

Norem said: 'I suppose you got the wages that were coming to you?'

'No. We haven't reckoned them up yet. And you?'

'Me?' said Norem. 'Naturally! I got mine first of all. I didn't dry fish any longer than I had enough money for.'

Edevart stepped back: 'Then your fish weren't dry when you sailed?'

'No. Oh, no, far from it. Why should they be dry when they were bound for the bottom of the sea?'

Edevart, almost in a whisper: 'Bound for the bottom of the sea?'

Norem: 'Ay, that's the way I understood it. But don't repeat what I say.

All right, but even so, one couldn't be certain that Norem had explained the affair correctly, and Edevart felt very uncomfortable as he left him. That old rascal! maybe he was even now trying to save his own skin first by giving out the impression that the shipwreck had been specifically ordered! For the first time Edevart felt there was something rotten about Norem—it seemed to be written on his face; his grey, hairy neck was coarse and indecent and he talked openly of his frauds and even bragged about them, a shameless, self-satisfied brute! 'I could almost honestly wish he were dead and buried,' thought Edevart. 'He was the one who gave me that idea about stealing money when I was buying fish last winter, and now, after all, what have I gained by my crookedness!'

As for the Chief, on the other hand, in spite of everything, Edevart regarded him quite differently; during his prosperous days Knoff also had been a rascal and a cheat and now he had been bowled over and was in trouble; but even to-day that pride of his was something healthy and fine, something that towered over the muck of the world. Edevart couldn't understand why he was beginning to feel sorry for Knoff—perhaps he was suffering a bit from a feeling of personal guilt in the matter of his downfall, besides, feeling that very human pity one has for a ruined potentate. He remembered from his childhood days at home how a certain *Lensmand* he knew had lost his commission and been discharged from the service of the government because of drunkenness—Edevart had wept and prayed to God for him. According

to the things he now heard from all quarters, Knoff was pretty badly off; Madam Knoff had become thin and poor in comparison to her former self, and now she had to help Jomfru Ellingsen in the house. And Knoff, himself, although he still went about with his thick gold chain across the front of his vest and his gold watch in his pocket, might expect even these to be taken away from him before so very long.

Edevart began to doubt that he would ever receive the wages he had coming to him; it wasn't at all certain that Knoff would be able to pay him off in full, and then what would become of him? His clothes were in good condition and he had a watch and a new gold ring, but these were all that he owned in the world. Save Doppen, of course! But what good to him was Doppen? H'm, let come what would, Edevart could always return to Polden and row as a fisherman off to Lofoten as formerly. At any rate, he decided that when Knoff called him in to pay him his wages, he would be sympathetic and have consideration for the Chief's difficulties. That was the least he could do; he really owed it to the Chief.

When Sunday came, he borrowed a boat and rowed off to Doppen, which now was 'Andreassen.' The green cove now lay faded and grey, the hut was desolate, all signs of life vanished. The only familiar thing that remained was the roar of the waterfall. He went over to the hay barn and stood still to dream there a while, just to turn in his mind the memory of all he had experienced there; then he closed the door and walked over to the storehouse—and here on the wall he found hanging a blanket which Lovisa Margreta had left for him. Good Lord, as though she hadn't had enough things of her own to think about! He carefully rolled up the blanket and carried it with him. In the wood-shed stood his crowbar and there he let it stand; out in the meadow great stones still reared their heads, grey and hard and frowning.

Here, once upon a time, a home had stood; parents and their children had struck root here and in this very place had experienced their joys and their sorrows; but now the home was abandoned. Not a sound to be heard anywhere, save for the waterfall roaring back in the woods. The vagabonds moving out into the world drag noisily their severed roots behind them, but the sounds are no longer heard in this place!

Monday morning as soon as the store was open, Edevart went in and stood there for a while. No folk came. The other store lad, Magnus, occupied himself by taking down from the shelves a few miserable remnants of dry-goods, dusting them and putting them back. Work which any one man could do alone, no work at all.

Edevart knocked on the office door and stepped in. He nodded a greeting and said: 'I suppose it's best for me to leave now—or what do you think?'

'What I think is, absolutely no!' answered Knoff. 'Do you want to leave me alone here? What's the matter with people anyway? Soon the Christmas business will begin!' But just the same, Knoff took in the situation at once. 'H'm, so you want to leave?' he asked and nodded. 'All right then, let's settle up! There is a herring-seine to be considered, but that's begining at the wrong end. Let's see, how long have you been in the store and how long did it take you to paint up the sloop?' Knoff took up a pencil and was ready for any argument. He knew how to look out for himself all right!

'I don't want any pay for that,' said Edevart, and when Knoff looked up at him, he added: 'No, for that was no work at all.'

Knoff seemed a bit softened; he had found he had no reason to be pugnacious. He smiled almost sadly and said: 'This is the first time I've ever known any of my people to give up any part of their wages of their own free

will; on the contrary, they have always thought they were getting too little for what they did.'

Edevart would at that moment have given a great deal to be able to stand before the Chief and know himself free from guilt. Without the slightest doubt about it, Knoff's folk had taken advantage of him wherever they could, had cheated him and gambled on that pride of his. No wonder then that the Chief had been forced to look out for himself and turn the tables on his people whenever he could! Edevart was touched and forgave him. Not so very long ago that same Edevart had felt it was a great thing to have hair on one's chest and look out for oneself first and last, yet here he was now with humility in his heart although his own pockets were empty. What had happened to him, was he out of his head?

The great trader, Knoff, had been forced to abandon one activity after another and here he was almost on the rocks. The past year had aged him and he no longer had the appearance of a magnate; unshaven, too, he was to-day and Edevart noticed that out of his ears little grey tufts of hair were growing. A pitiful wreck of a Chief! but his head was still unbowed! Suddenly Knoff seemed to decide that he had smiled sadly quite long enough. So, he resumed his busy attitude, took out his gold watch, looked at it, put it back in his pocket and said: 'You have six, going on seven months' pay coming to you. Don't disturb me now!' And with that he figured the whole thing out and wrote it down. While still writing, he said: 'That seine—I'm not sure—the book-keeper didn't have time to look up what it cost me originally. What will you give for it?'

Edevart answered evasively.

Knoff: 'Shall we say ten dollars for the seine?'

Edevart: 'Ay, and thanks. If you're willing to let it go for that.'

Edevart received far better treatment than he had expected. When they parted, the Chief remarked: 'I feel very badly about your leaving!' His last words were short and to the point: 'But you can come back to me when conditions are improved.'

Returning home to Polden, Edevart found the place seething with news—the whole district roundabout was like the sea in a storm, for something wild and terrible had happened.

Who could have believed that there were certain apparently decent people who went about among them there in Polden with dark and even murderous crimes on their conscience! It took one's breath away! People were not used to it! For years they had been singing the old song about a horrible murder way down in Strassburg and had shuddered through the worst stanzas; and they had long remembered about Andreas Mensa who had been captured ten villages away in Lofoten; and they had not forgotten about the girl, Ellen, who had strangled her own child, but even this had happened in the neighbouring parish and not here. Never as long as they could remember had there been any evidence of inhuman lawlessness in this wretched but peaceful place—but at last it was Polden's turn.

Ane Maria had just been arrested and taken away.

Edevart heard from every mouth the story of her painful conscience and final confession; during the bright summer-time she had been able to bear up under her heavy burden and remained easily enough in her right mind, but when the dark misty autumn set in, her soul collapsed. It had begun one night when she had awakened the neighbours with her loud screaming; then when many folk had come and lights were lit, she got up out of her bed and, standing there in her night-dress in front of her husband, Karolus and all the others, she took upon

herself the blame for the death of Skipper Skaaro who had gone down in the bog a year and a half ago.

An unheard-of affair! 'She has been to bed and dreamed it!' everyone had said. They imagined that it was only a return of her old sickness of the winter before, when she had gone about mumbling and out of her mind. But so detailed and plausible had her many explanations seemed, that there could no longer be any doubt as to her guilt. Later, when she repeated her confession for the benefit of the priest and the magistrate, her voice did not falter and she begged for punishment. Even then there was something righteous and determined about this Ane Maria—no weak straw of a woman was she! She wept as though she were being flogged, but she never let out a sob. When the magistrate asked her if she had had some grudge against Skipper Skaaro, she answered: 'No, no, anything but a grudge!' And then asked why she had murdered him, she answered boldly: 'Because he wanted me but wouldn't beg me enough—because he let me be!'

Taken all in all, Ane Maria displayed such unusual frankness on this particular point, that the magistrate could not help but shake his head, and even the widow, Josefina from Kleiva and the young housewife, Beret, both of whom had been so wickedly interested in men, stood aghast at Ane Maria's brazen confessions—had the affair been less hideous, they both might have held their hands over their mouths and snickered.

Even the magistrate was in doubt as to what was the correct thing to do with Ane Maria. This was an extremely difficult problem she had presented him with, unhappy and childless as she was, uncontrolled in her desires and sensual, yet powerful and cunning. She had taken it into her head to punish Skipper Skaaro and coldbloodedly she had watched him sinking deeper and deeper down into that bottomless quagmire. Yet, on the other

hand, it had been proven that she had finally gone running after people to get them to come and rescue him—she had run as fast as her legs could carry her. But after all, hadn't she returned with help too late, thus indicating that she had waited too long before calling for assistance? Now the fact that she considered she had a good reason for revenging herself upon Skaaro ought certainly to create some doubt as to her sanity; in any case, her self-accusation and open confession ought to go far toward mitigating her punishment. The end of it was that the magistrate was lenient and sentenced her to a place which was something between a prison and an asylum.

But it was a long time before peace could be restored to Polden. After such an alarming tragedy had taken place right in the middle of the village, it was not at all unusual to find even grown folk refusing to remain out late at night and children afraid to go out on the water after dark! How easy it was for any of them to hear a cry from out the bog!

Then there was Karolus; what about him? He himself developed into something of a problem. As for Edevart, he seemed to benefit by the general excitement which had been aroused in the village—not a soul paid any attention to him, not even his brother, Joakim, one of those who night and day kept watch over Karolus; thus Edevart gained time, for Joakim didn't come at once to demand his money.

Karolus had been bowed to earth by the fate which had befallen his wife—no one could ever doubt that. He ate nothing and drank nothing, simply went off into the hills and lived in the rocks and the bushes and lay down on the ground and talked to himself. God shield others from such terrible thoughts of suicide as assailed the mind of Karolus!

While there was still some sense left in him, several of

the men went out to him and tried to get him to return home. But oh, no, he muttered, that was a thing he wouldn't do! They argued with him and asked him if that was the way the head-man of the village and the owner of a boat ought to act? It was all the same to him if it wasn't! 'But man alive!' they said. 'This is no kind of a life to be leading with nothing to eat and nothing to drink; why, you're likely to starve and freeze to death!' But it was all the same to him if he did—let him perish—there was no hope for him anyway! In the end they warned him that he was blaspheming against the Lord by staying out there all night long, particularly since there was danger that at any moment there might come a cry from the bog. 'Never mind about that!' answered Karolus; the Lord would look out for him all right! They got nowhere with him and had to go away and leave him.

However, it came to pass one dark and stormy night that Karolus must have felt that the Lord was not looking out for him enough, or maybe it was that he had heard something out in the bog, for he came sneaking home through the pitch-black night and sat down outside the village until shortly before dawn when he went over to the store-house, took a couple of loaves of bread and some other morsels of food and ran off with them. Some one had caught sight of him from one of the huts and had called out to him, but he had not answered the call. Poor Karolus, things looked pretty dark for him—he had gone out in the hills to live and no one could get him to come home! Every day people went out to reason with him, but one day when they went, they found he had gone out of his head completely. There he lay flat on his belly and wouldn't turn over on either side when his visitors arrived. Handsome and peaceful he was as he lay there with his nose in the earth and with no polite word of greeting for any one! Beneath him was his yellow sou'wester—

he had been lying on it and now it was all crushed and wrinkled, that brand-new sou'wester of his! When they turned him over on his back, he remained there curled up in a ball with a sick look on his face. They spoke to him, but he was no longer able to answer. It must have been extremely tedious and uncomfortable for him to remain in that position, his bent knees up in the air, his head between his knees, and folk muttered amongst themselves that maybe he had been seized with a cramp. At that point Karolus suddenly rolled himself over and on all fours began to run around in circles, like a little dog chasing its tail! And when, after a while, he abandoned this good-natured sport of his, and lay down again elbows first, just as an animal lies down, forelegs first, what a pitiful sight it was!

Suddenly he took from his purse a dollar bill and tore it right in two, and no doubt that was the last dollar bill he had to his name. Folk then saw that he was not simply fooling; they would have to take him home by force. One of the men ran off for a length of rope in case he were to offer resistance, the others remaining behind to watch over him each in their turn. Here was a sad case of lunacy indeed!

But they didn't have to use the rope on Karolus after all—they lifted him to his feet and there he stood calmly by himself. 'What became of the pieces?' he asked. What pieces? Why, the pieces of that dollar bill of his. Oh, yes, Teodor had picked them up and looked out for them—Karolus would get them back, all right!

Then they gently led Karolus home; Teodor held him by one arm, Joakim by the other. He seemed to get along very nicely that way; he walked with a fairly easy stride. Who knows but that Karolus had had one lucid moment and had realized that it was a dog's life he was leading up there in the hills where he could simply hoard up his lunacy. Who knows, but that he had also been struck

by the notion that he had grieved long enough. 'Ay, it was too bad about Ane Maria, that it was, but—God forgive him the sin—he mustn't forget either what a nuisance she had been in some ways.'

And now this particular matter might have been considered nicely straightened out, if it weren't for the fact that a man isn't cured of his lunacy all at once; such a thing was not to be expected, and the watchers didn't forsake him. Hadn't Karolus, when a fit of his craziness was on him, wanted to make off with all the official documents? That would have been a great thing! A man who had been known to tear a dollar bill in two could hardly be trusted with all those important papers from the District Governor! He might even take it into his head to tear pages from the village register! Joakim, during the past year, had been keeping up the register and he didn't fancy seeing the work of his pen all spoiled. 'I'll see that that doesn't happen!' said Joakim and faithfully kept watch. And since he was beginning to run short of pocket money, in due time he would set down in the book that he was deserving of payment for the time he spent keeping watch.

One day he found it necessary to ask his brother if he might have a bit of money. 'Ay,' answered Edevart and gave him a couple of bills. Joakim felt that this was hardly enough, but Edevart explained that this was all he had with him at the time.

All in all, Edevart managed pretty well from day to day there in Polden; naturally he did not now enjoy the respect he had enjoyed some months before, for now he had no sloop and cargo, nor any other evidence of superiority to recommend him, and yet he was not completely ignored either. When there was fear in the minds of folk that Karolus would be unable to command the eight-oar during the coming winter, some of the men turned to Edevart as the one who should go in Karolus' stead.

They said they had no intentions of trusting their lives in the hands of a lunatic.

Edevart promised to think it over. Even though he owned no fishing-tackle he could use in Lofoten, the very fact that he had been chosen gave him a little more hope for the future, ay, something would surely turn up.

Then one day his reputation was further increased—that day when he displayed on his bed at home for the first time a bright-coloured blanket with a fringe such as had never been seen before in Polden. Folk shook their heads in amazement and thought: 'Oh, there is more where this came from—Edevart isn't lacking in money!'

But truly he was! He had hardly any money at all, for buying that farm down in Fosenland had almost crippled him entirely! He felt sorriest of all for his little sisters for whom this time he had brought nothing from out in the world. One of them had her locket and the other her snake-ring on a string around her neck, but they had both outgrown their Sunday clothes and now were in sore need of having Josefina from Kleiva come again to make them some new ones. Edevart was pained when he saw how needy his little sisters were; he knew very well they had already used up the money they had earned on the ledges the summer before.

One day, when he was preparing to set out for the store, he took good notice of how expectantly his sisters were watching him. They seemed to be thinking: 'What are goods for two fine dresses to such a man as Big Brother!' But it happened to be a great deal for Big Brother's pocket-book to bear just then, and he was fearful of the outcome of his trip to the store.

Gabrielsen's big new store was closed, simply closed. Edevart went into the kitchen, found the girl Olga within—the pearl-belted Olga—and through her managed to get Gabrielsen out into the light of day.

'What do you want?' asked Gabrielsen with a fierce look on his face. 'The store? All right, let's go!'

All the way over to the store he kept jabbering: why should he be standing there in the store all day long? Not a soul ever came there, he said. And those that did come simply wanted things on credit. He didn't care for customers like that! 'What was I going to say? That's a fine head-man we've elected down in Polden! He was supposed to be so much better than me! And now it turns out that his wife is a murderer and he himself walks around on four legs like a cow, so I hear. Congratulations! What was it you were wanting?' he asked and was all ready to measure and weigh.

Edevart hesitated before speaking, but at length he managed to say that he had come after a Lofoten fishing-kit. Ay, but he would not have any money until the following spring when he came home.

'On your way with you!' said Gabrielsen.

This in short was a refusal but Edevart was not of a mind to be turned away; he took out the deed he had for Doppen and laid it down.

'What good is that to me?' asked Gabrielsen. 'That's no hundred-dollar bill. Fishing-kit? I've had at least ten or twenty idiots come to me before you and try to get winter equipment by giving me a mortgage on their farm. The whole village are on their knees; there isn't a dollar bill among them. Mortgages? I haven't any use for mortgages—what I have use for is money, and if you haven't any money you might as well go home.'

Edevart muttered that he was good for a hundred times as much equipment as he needed; it was simply that he was at the moment a little hard up . . .

Gabrielsen: 'I'm hard up myself. Here I went to work and built this regular Pope's palace of a store and now I've got the damn thing hanging on my neck—it'll break my back any day now, and all I can do is stand here and

wait for the end. Am I to play God Almighty for everyone who is hard up? I've never listened to such nonsense in my life! Go on back home, along with you quick! What the devil have you done with the money you earned? Weren't you here last summer as a skipper in command of a sloop and a whole cargo of fish? Fishing-tackle? Just be reasonable about it: I have to pay for all my goods in thirty days and here you come around and want to buy fishing-tackle on four or five months' credit. There's a chance you might never leave Lofoten alive.'

Edevart: 'In that case you would still be holding a mortgage on my farm.'

'Mortgage, bah! Where is that farm of yours located?'

'Down in Fosenland,' answered Edevart.

'Therefore on the moon as far as I am concerned. I don't want any farms no matter where they are; I can't pay for my goods with farms. No, home with you, I said, there's no use in your hanging around here.'

'I see that you have dress-goods on your shelves,' said Edevart.

'Dress-goods? What if I have! Are you still here?'

'You can give me a few yards of dress-goods in exchange for this ring of mine, can't you?'

'Oh, I can, can I? Your ring?' asked Gabrielsen a bit confused. 'I've no use for rings either.'

Edevart: 'This one's gold. And if you can have cloth lying around unsold on your shelves, why not a ring as well?"

'It's gold, you say? Let me look at it!' Gabrielsen weighed the ring in his hand, examined the engraving, tapped it on the table to test its metal and said: 'Ay, in exchange for this you can have a few yards of cloth at any time. What kind of goods do you want?'

'Dress-goods for my sisters. Woolen. I know just what

I want,' said Edevart and stepped behind the counter. 'I used to work in a store myself.'

They came to a bargain; Gabrielsen must have realized that gold was better for storing than cloth and was almost as good as money for pay; he became more agreeable and said: 'Your brother Joakim deserves a good licking. I don't mind telling you straight out. He was responsible for that big herring-strike last winter which turned things upside down for us. We were all of us corrupted by it and I'm not an ounce better than the rest. Good Lord, what a time that was! Everything became dearer and dearer, servants' wages went up to the sky, we were all blinded by the glitter of our gold and bought everything under the sun—we threw our money around. That lasted a few months and then we were poor once again and worse off than before, for we had fallen into the ways of corruption and were spoiled. I had some fine imported cheese left over and what was I to do with that? Well, what do you think I did with it? I ate it up myself! Gobbled it up. The result of my own corruption. Well, if I hadn't, it would have become mouldy, you say? Oh, no, for I could have given it away, given it to the priest and thus got some of my church contribution over with. Ay. But instead of that, my old woman and I ate it up. And do you think I'll live any longer because of that? The very opposite maybe, for it already had worms in it. Oh, no, a person doesn't live any longer by eating delicate food than one does by eating ordinary victuals. But you can tell your brother that the next time he runs into a school of herring with that seine of his, he needn't come to me to telegraph everywhere for customers for him—I'll never do a thing like that again and that's sure! I've learned my lesson!'

When Edevart was ready to leave, Gabrielsen detained him with more of his gabble. 'I have to laugh when I think of our new head-man—I'll never get over it. That road—

oughtn't we to build us a road to help people get around? That's the very thing we ought to have done then while we had money in our pockets; and if I had been head-man, that's just what we would have done. Are you people in Polden labouring under the impression that Karolus is crazy? No more than you or me! That's a great idea,—nonsense pure and simple. It is just that he is tickled to death that he's got rid of that wife of his who wouldn't let him alone. But then, no matter what's told to you folk down there in Polden, right away you take it for gospel truth. Head-man Karolus! You just go on home and throw a bucket of water over him and give him a kick in the pants—you'll find he'll be all right! But even so, I don't suppose that would do him much good after all—he never has amounted to anything and he never will. Now go out and tell that to everybody you meet!'

Edevart departed. Outside he ran into Olga who, servant-like, had left her work and was waiting to have a chat with him. He was a young lad and she knew him; there came so few young lads to the store these days and she wanted to make the best of this opportunity. Olga had washed and tidied herself up for the meeting, but she no longer was wearing a pearl-belt around her waist. No corset, either, and no buckles on her shoes—nothing fancy about her at all—she was simply a dark-eyed girl who was out looking for a bit of harmless pleasure. Was there to be a Christmas dance in Polden this year? Then Edevart mustn't forget to invite her. Were those skipper friends of Skaaro's coming back next spring? Splendid fellows those—a whole dollar bill as a tip for the musician was nothing more than a bit of dust and straw for them! That was too bad about Ragna having a baby, wasn't it? But Ragna always had been a foolish girl—she was too young to know any better. And it was a good thing, too, that the baby didn't have to stay here in this world. 'They say it was her grandmother who strangled it.'

'They say what!' cried Edevart.

'That's what I've heard. Her old grandmother couldn't see how she could feed both the baby and its mother, so she did it. Haven't you heard about it yet? No, for you've been away all the time. But everybody around here knows about it. What was I going to say? Where did you sail to with that sloop of yours? To Trondhjem? Well, well! You've been about a good bit for a lad, haven't you? I tried to get down to Trondhjem myself, but it wasn't so easy, I found. Don't you think one of the skippers would be willing to take me along with him next time he comes to dry his fish? Even if you come back with your sloop, *you* wouldn't want to take me along—and I wouldn't blame you either, for naturally you've a sweetheart down south somewhere and would want to have her with you. No, no, you needn't try to deny it.'

Edevart returned home with his gold ring missing from his hand; but now he was far happier and more contented than he had been before he left, for he brought back goods enough for two dresses, and Josefina from Kleiva, when she came to the hut to dress-make, simply nodded her head to show how deeply she was impressed by this grand material. The little girls, however, had always known the kind of lad their big brother was—no matter what he might buy for them, they could be sure it was the best he could find.

It was decided that Edevart was to take charge of the eight-oar on her winter voyage to Lofoten; he was also to have the use of Karolus' fishing-kit. And Karolus agreed to all this, too! He had now become so sane that he understood whatever was told him and even a little bit more. He could not help noticing that his crew had lost their confidence in him, so he made believe he didn't mind staying home in the least while his boat and his fishing-kit were in use! What a devil of a fellow for getting

things through his head he had become! He even gave out the information that he was so deluged with official business, that he didn't have time to go off fishing. And from then on he occupied himself with pawing over documents and the village register without giving the slightest indication of tearing documents up, as formerly.

Edevart was not satisfied with the arrangement, far from it; although he was to act in the capacity of headman, his boat and fishing-tackle would in reality be the property of another, so he could hardly be considered as more than one of the crew and would receive only slightly higher wages than the rest, and what was that for such a one as had held the rank of skipper! Oh, well; on the other hand, should the fishing turn out to be good, he would make quite a bit from that, and he was badly in need of money just now, for he had begun to work out a plan for himself.

It was nothing grand or remarkable he had in his mind, but he would have to get away from Polden. For good? God knows, maybe for good. This was no place for him to live in!

Never had his imagination allowed him to believe that the village of his childhood could ever possibly be as hideous as Polden had turned out to be—murder and insanity and corruption throve here, a dark spirit of hopelessness had taken root in the minds of the people, poverty lurked everywhere and there wasn't even enough food for the children. A house in Outer Polden had been broken into one night and dried coal-fish stolen—and there in the snow lay the footprints of children! H'm, coal-fish which is utterly lacking in nourishment and tastes exactly like sawdust! That big haul of herring the winter before had dulled the people's wits and killed their understanding—they were ruined completely. The Village of Polden was bankrupt; was this any place to live in?

Edevart was staying with his father and every day

was helping to eat up the petty amounts of money the latter received from the telegraph company. But now that he was bound for Lofoten, where would he get the ready money to buy his winter's provisions?

Little Ezra was the only one who could still laugh and be gay. He stayed close by Edevart wherever he went, just as a couple of years before Edevart had clung to August—Ezra wanted to work for Edevart again so Edevart took him on as a half-hand in his Lofoten crew. And oh, what a sly fellow Ezra was! He had not been confirmed yet, but he managed to obtain the parson's consent, bought himself some oilskins and tackle and even then had quite a bit of money left over!

'Maybe you can loan me a couple of dollars,' said Edevart.

'Sure I can!' laughed Ezra and took the whole thing for a joke.

But there was really no other way out of it for Edevart—he had to borrow a few dollars from the little chap who had been his cook aboard the sloop, since he had tied up his own money in a place down south and wouldn't be able to get it out again when he wanted.

That need had been taken care of. Now for Joakim.

That Joakim had brains in his head! He had known for some time now that all was not well with his older brother's affairs—he had accidentally seen the empty wallet! And that day when Big Brother had returned from the store with dress-goods for the little girls, Joakim had noticed that he was no longer wearing his gold ring. Joakim was nobody's fool, he was a very thoughtful youth. And naturally he, too, would have to be buying food for the winter fishing and when at length Edevart came and spoke to him and told him of the trouble he was in, Joakim thought of a way out of the difficulty.

'What kind of a way out?' asked Edevart.

'Don't you wish you knew!' answered Joakim.

Edevart felt dejected indeed because of this attitude on the part of his brother. He couldn't reveal the whole secret of the way he had happened to buy his farm; however, he showed Joakim the papers he had for Doppen and told him something about the place—buildings in good condition, a nice range of mountains behind, a big clear-running river, a waterfall where they go for their water supply, splendid earth and meadow enough for at least two head of cattle—and the place lay on the shore of the prettiest green cove in the world! The former owners had gone off to America and had been forced to sell their place in order to pay their passage. He had got the place dirt cheap. The place was called Doppen, an odd sounding name.

Joakim sat and listened to him and discovered after all, things were not as bad as he had feared. How easily Edevart might have lost the money out of his pocket or gambled it away playing cards, for he had been knocking about the world quite a bit. No, instead of that, he had invested it by buying a farm, and that was not so bad. But just the same, Joakim had to shake his head a bit as he thought over the whole affair, for he had once been the head of a seine-crew and had become a wise man indeed!

Edevart: 'You shake your head, but you ought to take a look at Doppen first!'

'What are you going to do with it?' asked Joakim. 'Are you going to settle down there?'

'No, I don't know about that. But it was a wonderful bargain. Wouldn't you like to have it?'

'Couldn't even consider it!' said Joakim like a grown-up man, then lapsed into silence.

Edevart was glad that he had explained things to his brother and that the affair had been pleasant between them. He said: 'Just as soon as we begin fishing, you'll have your money back; that I can surely promise you!'

And although he was his older brother, in order to flatter Joakim, he began addressing him as he would an equal. Ay, he had plans in his head; he was going away from Polden, God knew that—yes, he was going away, for this was no place to live in.

Joakim: 'Where will you go?"

'Where will I go? It's been predicted that I'm to go to America like the rest. But later I'll see.'

The weeks passed. Christmas was over. A dull and lifeless Christmas this year which no one celebrated. These were no times for dancing and merry-making, folk were all too weighted down with trouble. Edevart wondered to himself what was responsible for his urgent wish to leave Polden; what had happened to him? Could it be that, wandering about from place to place as he had, he had developed into a vagabond? He had reached the point where one place was like another to him, neither better nor worse. And his feeling for home, too, had almost faded out of his heart—his roots had been loosened in the earth. No longer did he have any particular love for his old familiar haunts round about—these brooks and these paths through the woods, the mountains which towered above him, the fjord which cut in from the sea—what did these friends of his childhood days mean to him now?

One Sunday morning Ragna came to get him; she begged him to come over to her house, she had need of his assistance, trouble—

Edevart didn't have any feeling for Ragna left; she no longer meant anything in his life. When he recalled how they used to play together during their school days, it seemed as though he were merely recalling a dream. He remembered that once upon a time he had helped her hunt for a button she had lost in the snow, a pretty, bright button with a crown on it.

When he reached the hut with her, he found the little

old grandmother sitting at the table with her head leaning back against the wall. There she sat without moving, while Edevart stared at her in confusion.

'She is dead,' whispered Ragna. 'I went out for some water and when I came back, this is the way I found her!'

Poor grandmother, she looked so old and so white in the face. And now there was blood gleaming in one of her ears, but her expression was peaceful, almost smiling, and it was almost as though she didn't know she was dead.

'I'm afraid to stay here alone,' said Ragna. 'You must help me lay her out before she gets stiff.'

Edevart had never before looked upon a dead person and would have given anything now to be able to run away; but he thought it would be shameful of him to do such a thing, particularly since he had been asked to come and help. He must act like a man at any cost—August would not have retreated. Besides, it was morning and bright daylight. He picked up the body and carried it as easily as he would a child over to the bed—a strong lad he was and grandmother was so very thin and small—shrunken until she was almost like a doll! And she was even pretty as she lay there with that serene expression on her face.

Ragna knew just what to do and busied herself about the corpse: she closed grandmother's eyes and tied up her chin so that her mouth would not fall open; last of all, she laid a kerchief over the face. When they left the hut, she set a stone upon the doorstep as was the custom when there was death in the house.

Poor Ragna was then homeless and obliged to go with Edevart.

During the days they were living under the same roof, before grandmother was buried and Edevart departed for Lofoten, they had several talks. Now and then it seemed that she was in love with him, but since in return he felt nothing for her save indifference, this merely irritated

him and caused him to get up and leave her. This continued right up until the day she told him that Teodor was to have her.

'I never heard of such a thing!' cried Edevart.

Oh, yes, Teodor had asked her time without number and finally at Christmas time she had promised to take him.

Could it be that jealousy was stirring within him? Was there still some life left in his childhood love? 'Teodor, the lad with the rupture!' said he.

'I've heard he had such a thing,' she replied. 'But I don't know what it means!'

He didn't know any more about it than she did, but it was something pretty bad to have wrong with you, at any rate.

'Oh, well, there's no help for it now,' said Ragna resignedly, 'I've no one else to cling to.'

'Happy journey to you!' August would have said and been ready for his next affair. However, Edevart said: 'This is the worst thing I've ever had to listen to!'

'How so?' asked Ragna.

He got up from his seat in a rage and said in a tone of finality: 'All right, do as you like! It makes no difference to me!'

'I can't live alone in the hut,' she said, bowed down.

'Oh! So you want to throw yourself away?'

Ragna did not know what to say to that. They had a good thing to start on now that grandmother had left her the hut, and as far as earning their daily bread went, Teodor could do that just as well as the others. He wasn't a bad looking fellow either, and nobody could say he was.

'Well!' said Edevart, fuming. 'Since it turns out that you're in love with him, you're welcome to both him and his rupture. It's none of my business!'

Why, of course he was jealous—and he was not the lad to hide it either, not Edevart! When he recognized

his state of mind, he tried to laugh and put on a superior air. But he made sad work of that. His mouth froze into a grimace and his mind was having convulsions! Just think of it, that Teodor! Well, he was good enough for such a one as she! And then suddenly he felt the desire to tantalize her and insult her by mentioning the child—that baby she had got by going off there in the bushes, had she forgotten about that? Was it really true that her grandmother had strangled it?

Pale as death, she stammered: 'What— what's that you're saying?'

'That your grandmother strangled it.'

'No, no, no! That isn't— I don't know anything about that—'

'Then you're the only one who doesn't!' he said.

She sat with her head bowed low on her breast and listened to him—he rattled on in a bitter and stupid manner. He had always been a quick-tempered lad and was as prompt to do evil as good. Before he left, he snorted: 'Don't you know anything about it? You must have been lying there looking on! That would be just like you!'

Of course he later regretted his cruelty. What was she to him after all? The whole trouble was that she had never paid the slightest bit of attention to him; he had made a mistake, she had not been in love with him at all. No, she had simply overlooked him; she had formed the habit of ignoring him during their school days, for he had been so stupid in his lessons, a regular good-for-nothing.

He saw her again a few days later down at the boathouse just as he was making last-minute preparations for the voyage to Lofoten. He had assembled his whole crew made up of Joakim, Teodor, Ezra and old man Martinus and they were about the boat stowing away their boxes of provisions and attending to various trifles, when Ragna arrived.

She no longer seemed so broken; she was lively and

happy—little Ragna was downright merry and joked Edevart about his crew: mere babes in arms they were, said she—just one grown-up man in the boat! Ay, and this grown-up man was surely none other than Teodor, her sweetheart, for old Martinus was so old he had grown small again.

They all laughed at her joke and no one took it to heart; but Ragna went further and became spiteful toward Edevart: did he remember last summer when he was a skipper, how she had come out and cooked dinner for him on the sloop? He had been so grand that he wouldn't drink water unless it was served to him in a glass—

Edevart might have fired back more than one answer to this, but he kept silent. To chide him thus about last summer certainly seemed to indicate rather an ungrateful attitude on Ragna's part, for hadn't he helped her a good bit with her skipper friend? Suddenly Ragna herself must have realized this, for she covered her face with her arm, turned and walked away. And her head was bowed with weeping.

When good befalls a man, he calls it Providence, when evil, Fate.

Here in Lofoten it was Edevart's fate to have fallen to the level of ordinary hand on an eight-oar, he who the winter before had appeared as skipper of the fish-sloop *Hermina* and had been able to treat his friends from Polden with drinks and kringles! Quite a come down for him, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of others! Last year he had caused amazement and envy, this year there was nothing like that—the men did not consider the words which fell from his mouth as one bit more important than those which fell from their own. The old man of the crew, Seaman Martinus, had his wide experience to recommend him and could talk about fish and about prices, about

good fishing weather and weather when they might as well stay ashore. But what about Teodor! He might at least have kept quiet! Yet here he was talking more than any of them—that nonentity!

On holidays and on their days of compulsory idleness, they would sit in their cabin and talk about one thing or another, and the head-man had no more to say than the meanest member of his crew. And there sat old man Martinus—wise and serene he looked, although he was in reality as ignorant as a cow with a cud. However, he was not altogether without brains and furthermore he was of a religious turn of mind. Joakim, the village literatus, often went up into the town to fetch newspapers or learn a few songs with which to entertain his comrades. Edevart might have told them all about the great cities of Trondhjem and Bergen, but there sat Teodor, and he, as well, had visited both these places and would have it understood that he had had far more important experiences while away from home.

'Ay,' said old Martinus, 'there you are, you go sailing away and away and see all kinds of people and all the grand things in the world. But I don't know, I'm so poor and ignorant—'

Now what did he mean by that?

'Nothing much,' said he. 'Here you are, fooling and fooling around with life and trying to make it into something different from what it is, and queer it seems, after all. The Lord has created us all and has given each of us our proper place to live in, and here we are. But you must go sailing away to some other place. Now here I am, I've lived all my days in Polden, and my father lived there before me, and my grandfather too, and his father, and his father. And all of us lived and grew old there—over three hundred years it must be that we've all been looking at the same sky and the same earth. One hut got old and rotten and then another got old and rotten and then we

always built us a new one so we would have a place to stay. Providence looked out for us. We haven't gone sailing around the world, but we stayed in Polden and went rowing out after fish in the winter time and lived as well as we could one year after the other. That was good enough for us. We haven't any reason to complain to the Lord, for He has kept life in us and has not forsaken us.'

Well, well; this was a good kind of talk, all right, but it seemed only blabber and nonsense for a youngster to listen to, and Teodor began to whistle.

'There, you hear?' said Joakim to his brother. 'You're not to go away!'

'It was me as much as anybody he was talking to,' said Teodor, simply to put in his word.

'Now just take that Edevart,' the old man went on, uninterruptedly. 'He has gone sailing out upon many a sea and has looked upon cities in distant parts of the world. And last year here he was, right outside this very cabin, the skipper of a good big sloop and a grand young fellow in every way. He got so famous with it all that even Karolus, who was elected head-man of the whole village back home, was nothing at all beside him. But when a human being tries to fly higher than he has wings for, he's sure to have a fall.'

Edevart: 'You call it a fall to come back and be a fisherman?'

The old man: 'Oh, no, maybe you're right about that. But what did it all amount to in your particular case? There you went, sailing away and away, and got to be a big man and then when you came back again, you were no grander than any of us. You didn't have Providence with you.'

Edevart: 'God forbid, Providence couldn't be everywhere at once, and of course, It had to have Its hand over you!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the others.

'Oh, well,' said the old man patiently. 'Have it your way! But there you were back home again and Polden wasn't good enough for you any more, it was no place to live in, you went around and told everybody. Was it so much better then in the places you came from? Why didn't you stay there then? I don't know. That August, he's another of you young fellows who go sailing away and away and don't belong anywhere at all. Ay, and some day when he has to die, they'll lay him away in foreign ground. What's he sailing around for? He could have stayed at home. He was a good bright lad when he was growing up and he would have been a good lad to have right here in the boat.'

'No, no!' Edevart interrupted. 'August was scared to death in a boat.'

'What's that you're sitting there talking about?' cried Teodor. 'I've sailed around a good bit with August myself and never once saw him scared to death!'

'Hold your jaw, you ninny!' barked Edevart. 'I know what I'm talking about!'

They began to argue back and forth and soon they were quarrelling. The language they used was by no means elegant as long as the hard feeling lasted, but at last they made peace when they sat down to their common bowl of stew and took turns dipping their bread in it. There were no cannibals among them! They all were poor, but they had been used to that ever since the day they were born—a bit of success, a good catch of fish for the day, and they were as cheerful and happy as though they had come in for some great stroke of fortune. That was all they wanted.

After Edevart had fished for a time, he paid back what he had borrowed from Ezra, and it wasn't long before he was able to do the same for Joakim.

'How much do I owe you?' he asked him.

Joakim didn't know.

'Here's your money now, take it!'

But Joakim refused to take it and the brothers began to brawl over the matter and both became angry and neither was willing to give in.

'What's this money for, anyway?' asked Joakim, pale with excitement. 'Go and buy groats with it!'

Edevart called Joakim a louse and a pauper who couldn't afford to turn down money, to which Joakim retorted that of course he could afford it and that, what's more, he didn't have to borrow money to lay in his winter provisions, like some others he could mention!

In that case he must have stolen it somewhere! Could it have been he who had stolen the dried coal-fish in Outer Polden that time?

No, Joakim replied that he wasn't as badly off as that; the village fathers, you see, had paid him for the writing he had done for Karolus and for the time he had put in watching over the head-man.

'Oh, the devil with it!' exploded Edevart. 'You take this money or I'll get good and angry.'

'Put it into that farm of yours!' answered Joakim, jumping up. 'And now if you don't shut up, by God, I'll rip you open with this bread knife!'

Edevart looked at him and gave in; Joakim was quick-tempered like himself. 'The damn little fool can swear, too!' said he.

Oh, no, these brothers didn't use baby talk when they spoke to each other! There existed a friendly enough feeling between them, but they were somewhat shy about showing it. Joakim was no young simpleton who didn't know the value of money, but in this particular instance, he realized that his brother was in need of all he could lay his hands on in order to make his journey. Furthermore, Joakim had not touched the money he had earned in Lofoten—the fishing was good and he had been paid accordingly.

It was now well on toward the close of winter and Edevart had arranged for a new vessel to come to Polden with a cargo of fish to be dried; he had arranged things with a contract and all. The skipper who was coming this year was himself the owner of both vessel and cargo. He was an older man, quiet and reserved, whose home was in Ofoten, he would be his own chief drier. Joakim had been engaged to pilot him across Vestfjorden to Polden.

One day late in April Edevart had a confidential talk with old man Martinus and told him that he was thinking of making a long journey.

'I knew it!' said the old man. 'That's just what I was afraid of! And now who will sail the eight-oar home?'

Edevart had to laugh at this. 'Sail the eight-oar?' he asked. 'Any child could do that! Why, you yourself can take the helm.'

'No sir,' said the old man, shaking his head. 'I'll have nothing to do with your helm. I've never yet had the tiller in my hand. Here I am and I've always handled the tack and sat there on the gunwale and I've been satisfied with that all my days. Good Lord, how you do keep sailing and sailing around! Where can you be bound for this time?'

'Ay, where everyone is bound for, America, most likely. All your own children were girls, but even so, one of them went off to America.'

'Ay, but she went with that husband of hers. And then she died and now lies buried in foreign ground.'

It couldn't be otherwise; as soon as the fishing was over and the boat was preparing to return home, Edevart disappeared. He had taken excellent care of the fishing-gear he had borrowed from Karolus and had packed it neatly for return to its owner. His own oilskins he had left hanging in the cabin, but he himself had gone, and without a word of farewell.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A FEW of the steamer's passengers were scattered about on deck; it was cold and they had huddled themselves into the corners—some were sea-sick and were trying to hide their condition while others, who were better sailors, took pains to brag about theirs to all who were willing to listen. Edevart went down below-deck.

Down there he found three men sitting about an upturned barrel; seated upon bags and boxes, and playing cards for low stakes. They laughed and talked and pounded on the table as they played; now and then they took a pull from a bottle.

A young woman with several woollen kerchiefs wound over her head lay groaning with sea-sickness and seemed to be on the point of death. 'It won't be long now before we'll be getting into calm water,' said Edevart to cheer her up.

She looked up at him with lifeless eyes but did not answer. Sitting down beside her, he let his eyes rest thoughtfully upon his shoes. Soon the motion of the ship began to diminish and with that, the lady braced up; they fell into conversation and it turned out that she was on her way to Bodø to have an operation, since something was wrong with her throat. 'Where are you bound for?' she asked.

Edevart answered evasively; he had not quite decided as yet, quite a good way away from here, it might be. The woman had more than enough to think of within herself and she asked him no further questions.

Time passed. The card-players called over to Edevart and asked if he would like to take a hand. No, he didn't

think so. Ho, so then he was sea-sick maybe? Edevart smiled and shook his head and said that he was an old sailor.

'Come on, take a drink!' said they.

He went over to them and took a drink from their bottle —mild *brændevin*, nothing to go to one's head. The men were from the South, seamen discharged from ships that had bought fish at Lofoten but now were loaded and leaving for their drying-grounds. The men had their winter's wages in their pockets and were enjoying themselves immensely—ay, glad to be going home they were. And where was Edevart going?

Again he answered evasively. Ay, and where was he going?

He had left his oilskins hanging up on the wall back there in the cabin at Lofoten in order to let folk know that his fisherman days were over. But even so, he felt unsure of himself. He had set out on a journey, a journey to far distant parts—but where lay the road he would take? Oh, yes, he had thought it all out for himself and he had also told people about it, but when he considered his destination, he was forced to hesitate. Furthermore, where was he to get the money to take him far away? Everything turning out for him as it had, wasn't it just as well that he hadn't taken formal leave of his comrades back in the cabin?

What was the matter with Edevart? His hands were big and strong, his muscles equal to any task, but his spirit was gone. Here he was, sailing away and away, as old Martinus had said—a homeless and futile creature, a stranger wherever he went, dragging his roots behind him.

The card-players gained nothing by their friendliness; Edevart wouldn't play cards with them and he didn't appear to be much of a drinker, so at last they came to the conclusion that he was a student of religion, and decided to have a bit of fun at his expense.

'Folk have different ideas about card-playing,' one of them said. 'Some people think that it's a sin.' 'Some think that it's a sin to take a drink, too,' another added, glaring at him.

Edevart did not wish to give them the impression that he was a prude; so he laughed long and loud and said that as for him, he thought liquor was a great thing and many thanks, too, for the drink that he had got from them. He then adopted certain of August's experiences as his own, adding personal embellishments, and boasted that he had drunk many a fellow under the table and had had a hell of a time getting over it, too—ho, ho!

The sailors laughed at all this and slapped him good-naturedly on the back. 'Got a watch you'd like to swap?' one of them asked.

Edevart shook his head.

But they kept after him and asked him point blank: 'But you have a watch, haven't you?'

Edevart unbuttoned his coat, took out his watch and held it up to the light. He hoped that this would keep them quiet for a while, but that wasn't so easy. He found that the others, too, were watch-owners and had time-pieces which had gone perfectly for years without ever being laid up for repairs. 'Where did you buy that watch of yours?' they asked.

'From Papst.'

From Papst? Ay, Papst was all right; he had watches worth all the way from one dollar to two hundred, and he cheated only the rich folk.

'I bought my watch from Papst, too,' one of the sailors said. 'The best watch he had to sell, and guaranteed for life it was. Let's have a look at that watch of yours!'

Edevart held it up to their ears so that they might hear its flawless movement, but he would not let them open the case.

This peeved them a bit and one sneered: 'That watch

you've got there isn't gold!' Grumbling, they resumed their three-handed game. They seemed to agree among themselves to have nothing further to do with Edevart; simply to let him look on. Then the usual thing happened: they fell into a quarrel about money.

Edevart asked: 'Would you like me to say what I think?'

Ay, they all agreed that they would, and foolishly enough, Edevart acted as referee in the matter and promptly made enemies of the losers.

Time passed.

The ship came to a stop at one of her ports of call. The sea-sick woman felt so much better now that she got up, shook her skirts and preened a little. Then she opened a lunch box and began to eat some waffles. Edevart went to the galley and brought her a cup of coffee. 'It will be good for you,' he said. She thanked him kindly and offered him some of her waffles. Then she told him about herself.

Ay, she was to be operated upon in Bodø; her husband was coming up from the south to meet her there. His business took him about from place to place; a pedlar he was—no, a store-keeper—but he carried his shop on his back. He had been gone for many months now and she missed him so greatly that she could hardly wait to see him again. They had been together no more than a couple of weeks after the day of their wedding and then he had to go back to his business, and now he was wandering about everywhere, exposed to all kinds of temptation. She had given him a wedding-ring, but, God knew if he weren't maybe keeping it hidden in one of his pockets. But God forgive these words from her sinful tongue, for now he was coming up to meet her.

While talking, she had loosened the kerchiefs from about her head and neck and now Edevart could see her face. She was young and pretty, ay, all of that, even her teeth were without a flaw.

Edevart looked at her in amazement. 'I don't know, but it seems to me I've met you somewhere?'

'Mattea!' said she, and nodded.

Ay, it was Mattea from the Stokmarknes Fair, August's sweetheart for a day.

Edevart was unable to utter a word. 'That we should be meeting again!' he said at length. 'It was two years ago.'

'Three!' she corrected him. 'I knew you as soon as I saw you and so I wrapped all these things around my head. But when you were so nice to me and brought me a cup of coffee and all . . . and, anyway, I had no grudge against you. Where is that comrade of yours, that August?'

'Oh, that I don't know; out on one or another of the big oceans, I guess. He goes everywhere, you see, and sometimes he comes back rich and sometimes he comes back poor.'

'Was he mad at me?'

'We went out looking for you that last morning—we searched high and low for you there in Stokmarknes, but we couldn't find you any place.'

'I looked for him, too,' said Mattea. 'But then I didn't have much time left. Well, well, that was quite a while ago, wasn't it? What was I going to say! Where are you bound for?'

Edevart: 'Don't ask me! "With a thousand thoughts I wander," as it says in the song.'

' "And ne'er can have the one I love!" ' * finished Mattea with a laugh. 'Did she make a fool of you?'

'She went away.'

'Poor lad!' said Mattea sympathetically. 'But then you simply mustn't bother about her, a bright, good-looking lad like you!'

* 'Jag går i tusen tankar
Och älskar den jag ej kan få.' An old Swedish folk-song.

Edevart, flattered: 'What's the trouble with that throat of yours? I can't see anything wrong with it.'

'Don't you wish you knew,' she answered with a coquettish laugh.

'Ho, is it a secret then?'

'Ay, that's what it is,' she answered. 'Nothing's the matter with me, but I had to find some way of getting that husband of mine to come to me and so I wrote him that I was afraid to have an operation alone without him.'

Edevart was thunder-struck; he stared open-mouthed as though he were in doubt what to believe. 'That's a funny thing to do!' he said.

She saw that he was startled, and to soften the impression she had given him, she said: 'Oh, well, but he won't have to make the trip for nothing even so, that he won't. For I was having trouble with my throat when I wrote and now I'll go to the doctor the first thing I do and have an examination. But the main thing I wanted was to see him and nobody can blame me for that. Ay, and all the neighbours told me how it was, they said I needed an operation.'

Edevart seemed to take this in a better spirit and replied jokingly: 'Ho! then I'll go with you and look on while you're being cut up!'

'Don't joke about it; it may really be that I'm worse off than I think!'

'How can you talk like that! You who are so healthy and pretty in every way. I'd be satisfied if I could be your husband!'

They talked pleasantly together. Inside the skerries where they were now sailing, the water was smooth as glass and Mattea, no longer sea-sick, was gay and light-hearted. They told each other where they came from and he let drop that he had bought a farm down south, showing her the papers he had for it. In the evening they sat together until they fell asleep. When he noticed that her

hand had quietly stolen into his, he leaned over and kissed her. The deck was dimly illumined by a small lamp some distance away. Here and there sat passengers nodding in their sleep.

Edevart and Mattea awakened several times during the night, whispered a bit together and nestled up to each other; his arm was about her and that warmed them both. By morning they had become pretty well acquainted.

Coming into Bodø, she noticed from some distance away that her husband stood waiting on the wharf. 'There is that husband of mine,' said she. 'You remember him, I suppose? It's that Nils that I was engaged to, you saw him down at the fair. He is the son of a rich skipper up in Ofoten. Ha, ha, I have to laugh when I think of how silly that August acted!'

Ho, Nils! That was the young lad who had made August so angry that he had flung a stool at him and brandished a bread-knife! Oh, what a time that had been! And Mattea, that wicked little witch, she had convinced August completely of her innocence and later had taken a solemn oath that she would belong to him to the end of her days!

'What do you think, shall we ever be meeting again?' she asked of Edevart.

This remark was merely by way of courtesy and held no deeper significance, but at the last moment she managed to slip her hand behind her back and slyly into Edevart's. This produced an effect upon him, he lost his grip on himself and said uncertainly: 'I can just as well go ashore here myself, when it comes to that!'

He had no definite plans for himself, everything he had in his mind was vague and unformed; he had nothing to give up and consequently could follow his wildest whim. Light-heartedly and without hesitation he handed over his ticket and stepped ashore.

He treated the matter carelessly—it appeared a solution to his problem, ready-made.

Pedlar Nils was at first a trifle embarrassed to run into Edevart again. 'At Stokmarknes? Ho, that time!' he said.

'Ay, don't you remember?' said Mattea. 'Remember that crazy fellow with the gold teeth? Ha, ha! My, how he did cut up!'

They went up into the town, talking as they walked, stopped in front of a lodging-house that Nils knew and at length went in and secured rooms. Living in the same house as they did, they often found themselves together. Mattea went to see the doctor and, thanks be to God, found that an operation would not be necessary; the doctor merely gave her some drops to take and a bit of good advice, and this cheered her up considerably.

Nils had thought of a plan: how would it be for Edevart and him to go into business together? Edevart had his farm down south and on that they could borrow what money they needed. He himself had a rich father up in Ofoten, but it was difficult to get any money out of him.

Edevart didn't think ill of this plan by any means. It wasn't a bad plan at all, and what is more, it made him feel pleasantly important to sit there and be thought of as prosperous and solvent and able to say Yes or No in business matters. Mattea looked at him with shining eyes —it was as though she were anxious to have him near her and was really very fond of him.

'I'll think the matter over,' said he.

He thought it over. But, taking everything into consideration, why should he fall all over himself to form a partnership with some one in order simply to peddle goods from a sack? Nils grumbled over his lack of credit; he was very nearly sold out, was down to the bottom of his sack, but what difference did that make to Edevart? Couldn't he just as well turn that little farm of his to good account,

buy goods with it as security and start out peddling on his own? That would be another way out of his difficulty.

Mattea brought out the fact that Nils had experience in this business, he had been carrying it on for two years now.

Edevart smiled at this, let it be known that he was not exactly green either when it came to business—he had studied under an excellent master, too; none other than the great Knoff of Fosenland.

Mattea: 'But Nils has his regular route, he knows every person in the villages he goes to and knows just how to approach them. And besides, he has his father, hasn't he?'

Nils went out that afternoon to call on the merchants of Bodø to see if they would be willing to fill up his empty sack again. Left alone with Edevart, Mattea talked him over—ay, won him over so completely that he was unable to step back. She was enterprise itself, Mattea! But this time Edevart kept his wits about him, for this time he wasn't in love. When Nils returned home and learned the good news, Edevart dashed his enthusiasm by nodding curtly and saying: 'We'll arrange this matter by contract!'

'Contract! Why that?'

Edevart simply nodded once more.

They went to a lawyer to have the papers drawn up and Edevart stood his ground: the farm belonged to him, and it was he who would obtain the credit, therefore, Nils would appear in the bargain as his helper pure and simple.

Oh, that Mattea, that clever girl! She turned pale with anger. 'You'll burn that contract up!' she told her husband. 'That's exactly what you will do!'

Edevart said nothing to oppose her; Mattea wearied him with that excited and obtrusive manner of hers and he remembered how, three years ago, she had sneaked off with August's watch and gold-ring.

'Go ahead and burn it up! Don't let me stand in your way!' he said.

No, no, Nils would do nothing of the kind. Simply let them remain friends and time would take care of everything. It might not be so very long either before he would be able to buy himself out of the partnership!

The two pedlars laid in their goods, threw their sacks over their shoulders and set out each in his own direction. Edevart took the south-bound mail steamer and sailed down the coast of Helgeland. He went ashore with his sack and his yard-stick at one of the smaller ports of call to give his new business a trial. It was a bright early morning and the ground was covered with snow. A narrow footpath led up from the wharf to the little trading-station and from there a broad carriage-road continued on up into the village proper.

He paused beside a brooklet and there beneath a thin layer of ice he saw the throbbing pulse of water and heard its sad little voice. Later in the day he noticed that furry catkins were already beginning to appear on the osiers which had sprouted through the snow—these were the things he could understand, ay, these were the things he had known as a child and whose language his heart had learned. Oh, life had not completely corrupted him!

Things didn't go so badly for him in his new business; he wandered along in a southerly direction selling cloth, shoe-strings, combs and other necessities at the various farms where he called, and earned enough to live on and quite a bit besides. The sack he carried became lighter and lighter and ceased to be a burden to him; pleasant work this was which occupied him now—he could wander along or stay in one place just as the fancy took him; coming to a large village, he could remain there several days and call on all the inhabitants. Ay, and his wallet became heavier and heavier with bank-notes. The young, good-looking lad got along very well with folk; he conducted

himself well, was pleasant and courteous and didn't haggle when it came to prices and as a result he got his board and lodging for almost nothing. To tell the truth, Edevart had never spent happier days in his life than these, not even during the time he had been skipper of the sloop *Hermina*.

He sent a remittance to the merchant in Bodø and still had money left in his wallet. Occasionally he sent a little money to his father. From Nils he received no word.

He wandered along from place to place. Spring was now definitely at hand and the going was wretched indeed; the roads were muddy and almost impassable—he thought of getting himself a boat but realized that that would have to wait until he could better afford it. By late spring he had arrived as far south as Fosenland and considered going out of his way to visit Doppen, but he gave this up as well. The place was no longer a novelty to him, nor any pleasure to him either, since he had really not wanted to buy it—Doppen had after all been thrust upon him.

And now what's this? Wasn't it time that that good Nils was sending him some money? Why had he not done so? By this time he must have sold the larger part of his stock, for Edevart's own sack was practically empty now and he no longer carried it over his shoulder but under his arm as a bundle.

His road led past Skipper Norem's farm. A dog barked and some one came at once to the window—no chance then that he might slip by unseen. He quickly changed his mind, scraped the mud from his boots in a patch of snow and walked into the house. A hubbub of familiar greetings, many questions and answers, great amazement and much friendly joking. What was he up to now? Ho, so now he had become a pedlar! Out with that travelling store of his— Norem's wife was badly in need of four yards of cotton-stuff for another christening-robe—couldn't he see how fat she had grown!

There sat that Norem himself with an enormous fleece of grey hair covering his entire head; yes, there he sat and looked as self-satisfied and sinful as ever—neither he nor his family thought anything of the little white speck he had on the tip of his tongue. Death it was in truth, but they were quite unaware of that.

There was much news to tell, and Edevart heard all about the happenings in the village, about Knoff and his big place down by the sea—the store, the dock, the work people and servants who had been discharged, the sloop *Hermina* which had gone under, all the abandoned activities of the trading-station.

Edevart: 'So that's the way things have gone! Is Knoff bankrupt, then?'

No, simply crippled, said Norem; as good as ruined, he was, but not in the dust as yet. Satan alone could understand it for it sounded like a fairy-tale, but his son had acquired means; Romeo, that fifteen-year-old lad, Romeo, a devil of a smart lad! After giving up school, he pulled himself together, passed his confirmation exams, became a grown-up lad and set to work. No one had ever seen anything like it, fifteen years old and grown up! He had a guardian and had to ask him about everything, but he was so clever in every way that he got whatever he wanted. 'You remember him, don't you?' asked Norem. 'He seemed like anything but a promising lad before.'

'How did he come by his money?'

'His uncle, they say, a man of importance down south. All the Knoffs are powerful folk, you know. Well, this one was a bachelor and a large landholder, but a regular old miser for all that and, no doubt he refused more than once to help out his brother up here. So last year, after things had got pretty bad, they sent Romeo down south to see him and ask him for help; but oh, no, he couldn't do anything for them, he couldn't afford it. But young Romeo himself must have won the old boy over and made

him tender-hearted, for he gave the lad money and presents and last March when he died, he left his nephew everything he had. They're trying their best now to sell the big farm he inherited in order to save the place up here.'

Ay, news, much news to be told!

Norem had things to tell about the emigrants to America, the vagabonds from home—letters had come from many of them, and small sums of money, too, for some of the old folk left at home. Oh, no, things hadn't gone so badly for them off there in America; they had got work in the cities or out in the country and had no reason at all to complain. They wouldn't be returning home until they had become rich; no, for what was there for them to do back home, after all? They could remember how hard it had been for them to get a half-pound of coffee on credit when they had no money to pay with—ho, but now they always had silver dollars rattling around in their pockets!

'Ay, and good luck to those American dollars of theirs!' said Norem. 'But I wouldn't change places with them. And now as for that Haakon Doppen, one of my sons just had a letter from him and he writes that he made eight dollars playing the accordion for some wedding or other. Eight dollars for a single night's work—I've never made that much in my life! But then, what good does all that money do him? One of the others writes that Haakon Doppen spends all that he makes for drink—easy come, easy go, and he never lays a penny aside.'

Edevart: 'He has a wife and children.'

'Ay, you know them, don't you?' continued Norem. 'He's doing out there exactly what he's always done back here and he hasn't changed a particle. Didn't he spend years in prison here without its doing him a bit of good? He'll get himself into trouble in America too, you mark my words! And things aren't much better as far as that Lorensen is concerned, either. You know Lorensen, head-

clerk in that store of Knoff's. He's complaining now because it took so much of his money to cross the ocean. Ho, Lorensen, he's never been half the fellow he boasts that he is, complains no matter what he does! And now he's sorry he went away from home, for he's heard the news about how Knoff has come back into money. For there's no doubt about it that Romeo will be able to save the business!'

'What about yourself?' asked Edevart. 'Have you retired for good?'

Norem: 'Retired? What are you thinking of! But what can I do without a vessel? All I can do is wait. I've spoken to Romeo about it and it may be that it won't be so very many years more before he will have his own vessels again and then likely enough I'll be making another voyage to Lofoten. Why should I retire? Just get that out of your head! Who knows, maybe you and I will both be sailing up to Lofoten again in service of the same owner! You aren't thinking of spending the rest of your life with a bundle under your arm going around selling christening-rags, are you?'

'I don't know, I like it pretty well.'

'But man, you haven't any stock!'

'No, I'm sold out. But now I'll be laying in some new stock, and I've been thinking of getting me a boat.'

Norem did not appear to have grasped his meaning: the lad wasn't out looking for some one to sponsor his credit, was he? 'Boat?' said he. 'You can get that from Romeo. He's selling out. And if you haven't the ready money, what of it—he knows how honest you are!'

'I've money by me,' said Edevart.

Norem, relieved: 'You have, have you? What did you put up to get it, then? I didn't want to ask you outright, but they say you bought yourself a bit of a farm near here —is that right?'

'Ay, Doppen. That's right.'

'But then you can't have such a devil of a lot of money left, can you? But what of it, that's none of my business.'

Edevart, hesitant: 'No, not so much money after all, but a few thousand, maybe, but—' And he looked indifferently about the room to give Norem time to recover his senses.

'A few thousand!' he asked. 'Did I hear you right?'

'This isn't such a small business I'm running,' Edevart condescended to reply. 'I have a couple of people working for me up in Nordland.'

'Well, I'll be hanged!' said Norem and gave in.

Edevart wandered over to the store. He was thoroughly familiar with the place, he himself had stood behind these counters and sold goods and taken in money. Magnus was still clerk, but now he had grown up to be a big, tall lad—a regular man, he was now. Edevart had intended asking him to write a letter to Pedlar Nils for him, a letter demanding money, for he was much cleverer than Edevart when it came to writing; but Magnus was behaving very queerly for some reason—why, he barely condescended to nod by way of greeting. Edevart bought some trifle or other to justify his call and promptly left the store.

Out in front of the store, he encountered Jomfru Ellingsen and stopped to give her his hand, but she continued on her way. Of course she nodded to him slightly and showed that she had recognized him, but nevertheless she walked straight ahead. This filled him with astonishment, but not disappointment, for he had been a bit nervous about meeting her in the first place. He followed her with his eyes, but she did not turn around.

He went over to the bakery and yes, the bakery was in operation, a fire in the oven, two men kneading dough, the baker himself, Edevart's old room-mate, and a helper busy within. All was just as it should be. The baker told

him that right enough he had gone down to Trondhjem and had found himself something to do, but that he had been called back a few months ago by Romeo and was now back here again for good. Many changes for the better; ay, the place was on its feet again.

Edevart asked about the cooper.

Oh, yes, the cooper was still here living in that same old house of his; the cooperage was closed down, but the cooper himself had taken up another line of work—he had become a hired man on the farm and spent most of his time cutting trees in the forest.

When he was on the point of leaving, Edevart said jokingly: 'Oh, well, I just wanted to see how you were getting along. I was wondering if there was anything you needed, whether you had flour or not!'

'Ay, I've flour,' said the baker.

'For if you haven't, I can just as well bring you a couple of hundred sacks again!'

He went to see the cooper; he found the cooper's wife at home and asked if she would be able to lodge him for a few days as she had done in the past. Ay, that she could. They talked a bit together, mostly of Knoff's affairs, she telling things after the manner of her own sex and interests. Oh, no, it was no longer necessary for Madam Knoff to go about doing house-work; two house-maids they had now, for Romeo did not want his mother to wear herself all out. Oh, Romeo would restore the old order, he would, now that he was rich and all that! And Jomfru Ellingsen, she was engaged to that Magnus who worked in the store.

'What!'

'Engaged with a ring and all, everything arranged and taken care of. Of course she's older than him, but she's a clever one all the same. Do you remember her? They say she went after him for all she was worth, and hung around his room from morning till night, but folks talk so much

—don't repeat what I say! Are you going to stay on here now?'

'No, I just came here to get me a boat.'

He went back to the store better acquainted with the lay of the land; as things now stood, he would ask no favours of Magnus. Instead he went straight into the office where Romeo was. 'No—!' cried Romeo, overcome with surprise, putting out his hand as he had done when he was small. 'Well, well, so you've come to see us again!'

Romeo had not matured very greatly. To be sure, he had become tall and slender, but his arms had outgrown the rest of him and now his wrists protruded from the sleeves of his coat. 'What have you on your mind?' he asked. 'What's this that's taking you around? I hear you've become the owner of a farm here in the district, what's the name of the place?'

'Doppen,' answered Edevart, but didn't go into the matter more fully; instead he explained that he had gone into business for himself—he had to say something—and ended by hinting about a boat.

Romeo: 'A boat? Very well, then, a boat you must have. A four-oar or what do you say?'

'Ay, a four-oar. With sail and anchor and fully-equipped. But that isn't the main reason why I came to see you to-day, although it's a shame to ask you to do it and take you away from your work—'

'Out with it!'

Edevart explained himself further: he had a man working for him up north, had loaded him up with goods to sell, but time had passed and he had had neither word nor money from him. The better part of six months had gone by. Would Romeo be so good as to write a pressing letter to him and demand that he send on the money?

Romeo sat down and wrote at once—a sharp letter it was and composed in a most business-like style. Romeo took pains to do his best; perhaps his young heart was

flattered because this Edevart, to whose arms he had clung as a child, was now addressing him with terms of respect and deferring to his superior position. 'Yes, come whenever you are ready,' he said at length. 'And we'll go down and pick out a boat. You may stay here as before and share the baker's room.'

'I've decided to stay with the cooper.'

'No, why that?' asked Romeo. 'I'm sure that father would not approve of that. He has spoken of you often—he said you were an excellent skipper. Have you looked in on him?'

'Not yet.'

'Come this noon and have lunch with me; you'll see him then.'

Edevart excused himself—he wasn't dressed well enough just now; the roads were so muddy these days and he had dressed accordingly. Many, many thanks for the honoured invitation.

He stayed at the cooper's house and rested. In a couple of days he began to take evening strolls about the place, pretending that it was his friend the baker he was looking for, but with his thoughts really elsewhere. 'My,' he thought 'what a downright shame it was that Jomfru Ellingsen had taken up with that store-clerk, Magnus—ay, in all justice to her, a sin.' Of course if he must consider seriously the point of justice, Edevart had hardly deserved better treatment from her,—but a store-clerk, that callow youth Magnus! If Edevart could arrange to meet the lady somewhere alone, it would be strange if she wouldn't show him just a bit of affection, if only for old time's sake, wouldn't it?

He was unable to catch even a glimpse of her—she was certainly keeping herself under cover, either in her own room or in that of her store-lad sweetheart! Not once did she put her nose out-of-doors. This ought to have increased his respect for her, since she thus proved she

wasn't a cheat—when she had promised herself to one, she let all the others alone. Well, well, but she had been a bit of a flirt in her time, all the same—what was that name of hers? Karolena?—Oh, yes, she had flirted a little once upon a time, had taken the bit in her teeth and hopped into this and into that, and the devil himself had been unable to hold her in check. All right as to that, but now she was loyal indeed, loyal to Store-clerk Magnus.

Edevart hung on at the trading-station, but not because he wanted to! He was tracking down a quarry and this alone was what had forced him to wait. Yes, that was the way things stood! And so he stayed over his week.

One day he received a message that a letter had arrived for him. It was from Mattea, and offended and harsh in tone; in it, lies and truth were mixed, but otherwise it was real, overwhelmingly real. Here now was the money Nils owed him, and Nils, praise God, was no longer to be a helper, for he was not to forget whose son he was, wrote Mattea. And then she reminded Edevart that he had never let them hear from him even so briefly as to send them his address! How then could Nils have possibly sent money to a wandering pedlar who never left any address behind him! She had been holding the money for him for some time now, she continued in a tone of righteous indignation, and if he wished to avoid unpleasant consequences he had better not think of dragging Nils into court.

That hoyden, Mattea!

Good! Edevart settled up to the last penny his account with the merchants in Bodø and still he was a man of means. He sent a couple of five-dollar notes to Joakim back home and still he was money ahead. And now, just in case Romeo had taken it into his head that Edevart was trying to get a four-oar boat on credit, it was well that Edevart should go to him at once and explain how mistaken he was.

He met father and son in the office. The elder Knoff

drew himself up without putting out his hand, yet the greeting he gave to his former skipper was familiar and friendly enough. 'I am pleased to know that you have remembered my parting words to you—that you must be sure and look in on us when conditions had improved. I don't know whether I have much for you to do right at the present moment, but I imagine that it won't be so long before I shall.'

Romeo explained that Edevart himself was in business now, that he was on his way south with goods, had people working for him in Lofoten and was doing extremely well. Now he wished to buy a boat.

'Ay, it was the boat I wanted to see you about to-day,' said Edevart.

Romeo: 'H'm, all right. I said you might have a boat.'

Edevart looked at him, smiling: 'But I wasn't thinking of getting it on credit.'

'H'm?' said Romeo. 'You may have it any way you wish.' And then little Romeo who had grown to be so tall, showed what a bright lad he had become and how fast he could think. 'Have you plenty of goods?' he asked.

'No.'

Romeo: 'It just happens that we are weeding out our stock and selling some of it off at cost and father and I thought that you might buy your goods from us just as well as from others.'

The elder Knoff nodded, but with a quizzical expression on his face, as though he were hearing this for the first time.

Edevart: 'I had expected to buy my goods in Trondhjem.'

'Why there?' asked Romeo. 'We can make you a good price and load up that boat of yours right here.'

The elder Knoff raised his voice: 'See here, my good Andrésen, are you doubting that I can undersell the smaller merchants in Trondhjem?'

'No, that's not what I—'

Romeo: 'We have some left-over stock which you may have at a rock-bottom price, dress-goods, shawls, articles of necessity. They are just as good as new, but they have been on our shelves some time. You can sell them and make a good margin of profit. We ourselves aren't able to get rid of them, for people recognize them from year to year. Come along with me into the store and have a look at them; a good many of the things you will probably remember from the days you used to work there.'

They went into the store and looked over the shelves and began bargaining over a large pile of merchandise laid out on the counter. Edevart was overwhelmed; he would have to look out for himself, he would have to hold them back. 'I can't afford to buy this entire store of yours! No, no, not twenty bolts of cloth, ten ought to be enough! Where in the world will I be able to sell all this? The boat won't even be able to hold it all!'

More than once he stopped to consider. The prices were not exactly rock-bottom, but they were unexpectedly low and Romeo never seemed to tire of repeating: 'Go on and take it, we won't be selling it ourselves, anyway—pay us for it later!'

Magnus thrust himself forward once or twice, naturally he wished to look out for his master's interests and said: 'No, you're foolish to let it go for that—that's less than half-price—I can show you on the invoice—!'

Romeo did not even reply to him.

They were not yet finished with their task when the elder Knoff emerged from the office, snapped open that gold watch of his, snapped it shut again and announced: 'It is lunch time. Andrésen, you will join us!' Again Edevart sought to excuse himself, but Knoff uttered but one word: 'Come!'

And now once more Edevart had been admitted to the sanctum of a gentleman's parlour and stood looking over

a wall into a world quite foreign to his own. He greeted Madam Knoff and her daughter, bowing almost to the floor, and was rendered almost speechless by their cordial manner. No place had been set for him at the table, but Jomfru Ellingsen went blushing out of the door after the missing silver. He felt out of place here and wished himself far away, but Romeo took the chair beside him and now and then even the elder Knoff would address his remarks to Edevart. 'Are you thinking of remaining in business permanently, Andrésen? For if you are, you may use my name as reference.'

The thing that caused Edevart greatest distress was that Jomfru Ellingsen was obliged to serve him, to pour him his soup and change his plates. He was annoyed because he was not dressed especially for the occasion and because he didn't even have a gold ring on his finger; what must Jomfru Ellingsen be thinking of him? That he was just a common pedlar who bought his goods from a cross-roads store? But on the other hand, certainly not every pedlar who came along had been invited into Knoff's house and to his luncheon-table, and this alone had raised him to a position of distinction, hadn't it? It might not be long now before the Jomfru would be feeling sorry she had not held on to him! A bit of casual conversation also came to his assistance: the elder Knoff, happening to hear that he had been here for several days, remarked: 'So, I didn't see you?'

'He was staying with the cooper,' explained Romeo.

Knoff: 'With the cooper! Why didn't you come here to stay?'

Edevart, trying to evade the answer: 'It happened that —I thought—'

'You thought!' said Knoff, injured.

Romeo: 'There, do you hear, Edevart? I told you that father wouldn't like it, didn't I?'

And all this Jomfru Ellingsen heard. Wasn't that

enough to make her break off with that store-clerk Magnus!

He caught no further glimpse of her after the luncheon was over. He finished his purchasing in the store, picked out a boat for himself, paid what he could of the total amount of his debt and prepared to leave. Magnus was obliged to help him load up the boat; he did so according to orders and took care not to laugh and talk as he had in the old days, when he and Edevart had worked together in the store.

'When are you sailing?' he asked, without turning his head.

Edevart knew that Magnus would be glad when he had gone and that his anxiety was dictated by ill-will. Edevart felt himself wavering. Suddenly he realized that he didn't know what to do. Here he saw before him an angry and jealous youth whom he could plague and torment if he cared to. But Magnus had always been a good lad, so why should Edevart try to make things hard for him? And then another thought came to him, one which caused him to pause: here he was on the point of setting out on a business enterprise with a boat heavily laden with goods —would Heaven be apt to bless him and his enterprise if he were to play this Magnus false? Surely there was a God in Heaven, wasn't there?

'I'll be sailing right away,' he replied. 'I've no further reason to stay on here.'

There, it was said! And after he had wasted so many fine days simply trying to effect a meeting between a certain lady and himself. August would have cursed and sneered at conscience, considering only the excitement of the moment. But in his heart Edevart felt himself far too righteous for that.

Magnus, relieved: 'So, you'll be sailing right away? Are you all ready to set out, then?'

'I've only to go and settle up for myself with the

cooper. Ay, and now, Magnus, what do you think about this business of mine?' asked Edevart, wanting to be friendly.

'What do I think?' answered Magnus. 'I could wish that it was me as had those goods of yours and had bought all you did.'

'So, is that what you think? Ay, and now thanks for all you have done!'

They parted. Edevart went up to the cooper's at once and settled for his board and lodging, and immediately set sail with his floating store.

There were inconveniences involved in travelling by boat, naturally, for he had to tie up at various places and leave the boat behind while he himself covered the district inland. In reality, he could have covered far more ground afoot. The one good thing about the boat was that it served him as a warehouse where he could store all the goods which he was unable to carry in his sack.

He worked his way southward, sold his wares at reasonable prices, yet made a fair margin of profit. This convinced him that he had been fortunate in his purchases. By St. Olaf's Day he was able to send a large remittance back to Romeo without using up all of his money. But his chief joy was the fact that he could drift lazily along as he worked—was his own master, and could either wander on or lie down to rest just as he felt inclined. This was the very best thing in the world for him, considering the rut into which he had fallen.

He sailed into the Fjord of Trondhjem, covered the entire district to the west of it, passed Inderø without stopping, pressed forward into Namdal, and turned and came back through the inland villages. Summer had passed; it was now late autumn and snow lay on the ground. On a farm up in Frosta he ran across August.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AUGUST here?

He was working on the farm, had not gone down to Bergen as he had said to sail the seven seas, but had wandered about from place to place in the vicinity of Trondhjem and had taken what work he could find.

A quiet and lowly creature now, he came tramping in to supper; tucking his cap under his arm, he let his eyes rove about the table for an empty place. Now he was a hired man.

Edevart had just obtained lodging for the night in the loft and was sitting and looking about. Two girls were busy in the kitchen at the time; also several children had assembled there for supper. The table was set with two large bowls of milk. A lighted lamp swung over the table.

As August caught sight of Edevart, a sheepish smile crossed over his face and he leaned forward to have a better look at him. Edevart stared back. 'What in this world!' he said. 'Is that you, August?' An unexpected meeting indeed!

The farmer came tramping in with heavy steps. He was ponderous and slow in his movements and wore working clothes and knee-boots; a youngish, powerful man with a blond, full beard and an upturned nose. He stared in astonishment at the two comrades who had discovered each other and had fallen into conversation.

'A scrap-pedlar it is who's to abide for the night,' explained his wife. 'He can sleep in the room with the hired man.'

The farmer said nothing, but sat down at the table and picked up a spoon; later, the others sat down to the eve-

ning meal, the last being August who had held back for a time, uncertain.

During the course of the meal the young girls joked in an undertone with August and seemed to get somewhat the best of him, but he didn't seem to care about that, laughing a bit himself at their chaffing and acting as though he were used to it. And in this Edevart recognized his old comrade from home, from the huts up in Polden, where he had also laughed good-naturedly while folk were making fun of him—quite a different August from the one that had stood on the deck of the *Seagull* and shouted orders and been such a pompous admiral! August was subdued as he sat here, enduring patiently the jibes of the girls and the children. It seemed that they carried on as far as they did because they now had an audience in the person of the strange pedlar. They went far indeed with their fun, and asked him if those gold teeth of his were to chew porridge with.

'Just a pack of idiots!' explained August, laughing, then glanced hastily at the farmer to see whether he had not perhaps said too much.

They made fun of his Nordland dialect and even undertook to correct it—these young whippersnappers from Trondhjem's hinterland where the most hideous of Norway's dialects is spoken! Ghastly to hear, August thought their idiom.

Edevart was indignant on behalf of his comrade.

After supper the farmer's wife asked: 'Whorfrom be 'ee tow meet?'

'Back home,' answered Edevart, intending to support his comrade. 'We come from the same village. I've been his mate at sea.'

August: 'Now do you believe what I told you about me being skipper of a sloop?'

'All right, if you were,' answered the woman, evasively. 'It's all the same to me what you were.'

'None of you folk will believe me,' continued August.

Silence.

'H'm,' the farmer cleared his throat. 'We've the right to believe what we will of all those yarns you've told us!'

At this August closed his mouth and hung his head, but Edevart spoke up with a challenge in his voice: 'I never thought you found it necessary to tell lies, August! If only you were to tell what you've actually experienced, that's more than enough to astonish folk here in Frosta.'

Silence again. This time even the farmer was silent, but he wrinkled his brow, none the less.

The young girls now tried to smooth things over; one of them recalled what a wonderful musician August was, anyway.

'No one like him!' the other agreed. 'If only he'd be willing to play.'

August: 'I don't play every day.'

'Every day! Why, you've played for us only once.'

'And that was the last time, too,' said August.

The girl, hurt: 'All right, have it your own way, then!'

August and Edevart went over to the room where the farm hands slept. Edevart said: 'What kind of a cesspool is this you've fallen into?'

'Don't talk so loud!' said August.

'What do I care!' said Edevart. 'Just let them hear what I say! Are you thinking of staying on here?'

'No, not much longer. Only a couple of weeks, until my time is up.'

Edevart: 'As I told you before, I'm out peddling goods through the country. You must come with me in the boat.'

'What's that? No—'

'Would you rather stay on here?'

'Don't talk so loud, I tell you! No, I don't want to stay on here. But I've still a couple of weeks left. I don't know—'

'Don't you think the farmer will let you off before your time is up?'

'Maybe. If you speak to him. But I can't go with you in the boat.'

'Why not?'

'I'm no good at all in a boat, I'm scared to death, you know.'

They talked the matter over. He could get along in the boat as long as they remained in Trondhjemsfjord, couldn't he? Edevart asked: 'Are you worse than you used to be?'

'No, but I'm no better. I'll never get any better.'

They talked until midnight, August about the things he had done since parting from Edevart in Trondhjem, about all the farms and places he had worked on. But it never amounted to anything, he said, he had made no more than enough to buy a few rags for his back, and a few bits of trash, really nothing much at all. 'And you, are you overloaded with goods?'

'No, I've sold nearly all I had. But I've enough to take us both to Trondhjem.'

'I'd rather go by land,' said August.

In the morning Edevart had a word with the farmer. But he was rude and stubborn and turned away without so much as an answer. August went with him out into the fields with a horse and sledge. Edevart waited until they returned for dinner and then brought up the matter again.

'I don't know about that,' said the farmer.

'Oh, why don't you let him go!' said his wife. 'What use have we for him now it's coming on winter?'

There was a disagreement when it came to the question of August's wages. During his period of service he had got one thing or another at the village store and this the farmer had written down to apply against his wages; August had also received small advances of cash.

August questioned the very first item. 'Coffee? I never got a pound of coffee. What could I do with it anyway?'

The girls heard this and laughed.

The farmer: 'Here it stands, in two places, a half-pound of coffee—that makes a pound, doesn't it?'

'It wasn't me that got it. It must have been one of those other farm hands you had here last summer.'

'No, it was charged by you and no one else!' insisted the farmer vehemently.

'Oh, all right,' said August, giving in. 'I never bought two half-pounds of coffee, but I don't give a hang about that. Go ahead and set them down against me!'

Edevart pretended that he had not heard the disagreement; he settled with the farmer's wife for his night's lodging and for the roast meat he had had for breakfast, carried his sack out into the yard and returned into the house.

And now an argument had arisen concerning a neckerchief.

'That's one thing I never bought,' August was protesting. 'You must have written that down on the wrong piece of paper.'

The farmer pounded the table and cried: 'Watch out what you say there!'

August, apologetic: 'No, I didn't mean—I just wanted to ask you to look carefully and see if that's my paper you have there—'

'See for yourself!' ordered the farmer, raising his voice and thrusting the paper in his face. 'What does it say here? Can you read your own name?' But suddenly his voice died on his lips; he stared at the paper himself and couldn't seem to believe his own eyes. At length he managed to say: 'Ho, well, well, I guess this isn't your paper after all; it doesn't look like it is, anyway!' and with that he began to paw through some other papers of his.

August laughed heartily because he had been proven in

the right and glanced triumphantly over toward the women and the girls. 'What did I tell you!' he said. 'Ho, ho, ho!'

'Here it is!' announced the farmer and drew forth another slip of paper. 'That was a mistake. Nothing to make you lift the lid from those gold teeth of yours though.'

With that Edevart cried out to August: 'Why don't you ram your fist into that nose of his and make it turn up still more!'

The farmer craned his neck; he couldn't believe his own ears. August held his breath in terror. The farmer rose from his chair and took a single stride; Edevart was there to meet him and the two stood face to face, both pale as death.

'Edevart!' begged August, stepping between them. 'Never mind about it, do you hear?'

The farmer glared like a caged lion back and forth between the table and Edevart; sharply he called over to his wife: 'Go and open that door!' And when this had been done, he pointed to it and yelled: 'Out, you— Get out of my house!'

Edevart: 'I won't! I'm a witness to this transaction between you and August!'

What course would the farmer take now? His wife moved away from the wall. 'It was only a mistake, wasn't it?' she urged.

Then August tried to mediate again. 'Let it pass, Edevart. Don't let's even bother about it!'

'Witness!' said the farmer. 'I don't need witnesses to my transactions. This here was simply a mistake!'

'Ay, that's just what I said, didn't I?' said his wife.

'Ay, but that fellow there will have to have that knocked into that head of his!'

Edevart: 'Come on and just try to knock it into that head of mine!'

The farmer: 'No, I won't do it. I won't dirty my hands on you.'

Edevart had the last word: 'I just wish I had been in your place, August!'

The settlement of wages proceeded in peace.

Oh, that August! It now turned out that even here he had acquired him a sweetheart—one of the farm girls it was! At first it might appear that she didn't care much about him considering how, together with the others, she poked fun at him and made a fool of him. Ah, but she always made it up to him later, all right, when she hugged him and was good to him. He explained that it was necessary for her to act as she did in order to avoid suspicion on the part of the others. Oh, they were unquestionably sweethearts after their own fashion! But August had to endure this wretched treatment from everyone on the farm; had to let them bully him without ever attempting to defend himself simply so he could remain there over the winter. What wouldn't August do for a sweetheart! And now that he was leaving the farm in Frosta, there was sadness in his heart. 'She was true to me all right,' he said to Edevart. 'Everything she did was for my own good.'

'How's that?' asked Edevart. 'I thought I saw you give her some money when you left. Eh?'

'A couple of dollars—three dollars of my wages. It isn't so pleasant to be left here without a penny. Didn't you see that she was weeping?'

The weather was fair as they rowed away from Frosta, but August could think of nothing but getting back on dry land. So Edevart fitted him out with a sack and an enormous bundle of goods to sell along the way, gave him orders as to the route he should follow, some good advice, and a few sharp words of warning. At a given time they would meet again in Trondhjem.

August turned out to be a splendid salesman; covering his route, he arrived in the city practically sold out and with his pockets full of money. As he wandered along he frequently found his way back to the farms and places where he had previously worked, and folk recognized him and were glad to see him again. He had never been discharged from a job but had left each place of his own free will—had each time merely given in to his wander-lust, his desire to be moving on. And now he had come back again, this time as a wandering pedlar and he greeted them with a familiar laugh and was recognized—ay, here was that August again, the lad who had played the accordion just once and never brought it forth again; the lad with the gold teeth, the Nordlander who had been shipwrecked and had lost all he had to his name—here he was back again! Folk never turned him away but bought things from him and thought well of him.

Business continued to be good. He had learned to set high prices to begin with, later lowering them to a reasonable figure; ay, that was the way it should be in this particular business. There would be talk and lively discussions and sometimes arguments about things, but when he left a place he always received a 'Happy journey to you!'

Oh, yes, August was all right; he had a genius for business, he had—he was a pedlar by nature.

In Trondhjem the comrades bought themselves each a gold ring and fine clothes to make a good showing; then they shopped about in the various stores and laid in the supplies they needed for their trip north. Edevart paid the balance of the debt he owed Knoff and now stood forth, a solid business man, the prosperous owner of a boat and a cargo of saleable goods, with money in his pocket. A successful career and the result of a single year of pleasant vagabondage!

They set out on their journey north again, one of them

by highway inland, the other by water along the coast. Reaching Fosenland, Edevart paid another visit to Knoff's trading station, replenished his stock in the store with the aid of Romeo, got as good a bargain as he had the time before, and decided to lay over for a few days.

The cooper's wife again had a mouthful of news: the emigrants off in America were writing less frequently now; they had become Yankees, were making a good living over there and had silver dollars to rattle in their pockets. The young folks that had crossed the ocean had become more and more remiss about sending back money to the old people they had left at home. In some of the letters that had come there were complaints of hard times even over there in America; the wheat-crop was in danger because of terrible droughts, one half of the tobacco crop had been ruined by bad hailstorms. Head store-clerk Lorensen had written to Romeo and begged to be given back his old job in Knoff's store—he couldn't possibly get along where he was, he wrote. 'So it isn't so wonderful to be off there in America after all, is it?' the cooper's wife concluded.

'That's just what Skipper Norem said last year,' Edevart nodded. 'He said he'd never leave Norway to go to America.'

'Ho, Norem!' the woman began again, shaking her head. 'Ay, he's got troubles enough!'

'What kind?'

The woman shook her head again: 'Operation. Cancer. It's too awful to mention. They took him down to Trondhjem and did all they could for him, but nothing will do any good, they say.'

'That's dreadful news to be hearing! Is he in bed?'

'I can't say as to that. They've still got him down in Trondhjem.'

'How does he take it?'

'Ay, how does he take it? He can't even talk. They had to take his tongue right out of his mouth!'

Edevart raised both his arms and let them fall to his side.

'Ay,' said the woman. 'First they cut off half of it, but it's not so long ago now that they took it out altogether. There's really no cure, they say, for one who has a cancer.'

'There you see, there you see!' thought Edevart feeling very pleased with himself because he had neither gone off to America nor encountered any misfortune. 'Norem was telling me only last year that he would like as not get command of another vessel and go to sea again. Ay, human fate is uncertain!'

They talked about Knoff, the eternal topic of conversation. They spoke of Jomfru Ellingsen and Store-clerk Magnus—they were to be married this coming spring and would live in the little guest-house and would both continue in the service of Knoff.

Edevart, smiling: 'Will she still be "Jomfru" after she is married?'*

'Don't speak of it!'

'And if there are children, will she carry them over her arm?'

The woman: 'They say that she can't have children.'

They both laughed slyly over this last remark and made no secret of what they were thinking.

With a heavily-laden boat Edevart sailed away from Fosenland once again, and not even this time did he turn aside from his course to pay a visit to Doppen. In Northern Helgeland, the two comrades came together again and August was sold out for the second time—ay, a genius at doing business from a sack was that August! As Edevart's helper, he was worth far more than the wages he earned. He refilled his sack from the stock that remained

* 'Jomfru' in Norwegian means both 'housekeeper' and 'maiden.'

in the boat, decided upon the next meeting-place and started off again.

By late autumn they had reached Bodø and then they were, so to speak, home. Edevart did not wish to show himself in Polden with anything but a full-laden boat and he was therefore obliged to lay in more stock from the small warehouses in Bodø; this would hardly be profitable for him, but it was unavoidable. He realized now that it would be necessary for him to make some permanent arrangement with one of the large houses in Trondhjem whereby he could buy goods whenever he needed them and wherever he might be.

The fjord far in where Polden lay was frozen over and so they were obliged to tie their boat up in Outer Polden and go the long way up to the village on foot. They were in no great haste to do this; indeed they preferred that the news of their arrival should gallop on ahead of them. The burdens they bore were heavy, and their progress was slow and tedious, but they shuffled along, swinging their yard-sticks and chatting about this and that and occasionally stopping to rest.

They were wearing their brand-new clothes and their finest decorations. Heavens above! no ordinary lads from the village were these two! They did not wish to appear destitute upon their arrival back home; no, they wished to seem prosperous and open-handed and to be able to live up to their appearances—Edevart wished first of all to be generous at home, to lavish his new wealth on his father and his sisters and brother. They were so grateful for what little they received—how, then, would they not be downright speechless to have such a flood break over them?

It was bitterly cold; they were obliged times without number to blow their noses and afterward to wipe them with the gaudiest of the handkerchiefs they had for sale.

August had put much care in his person and had sprinkled himself with perfume and parted his hair in the middle. He had no father or brother or sister before whom he might shine, but none the less he didn't want to be left behind. Of course he couldn't very well start in talking Russian in a village where folk did not even understand English, but was he, therefore, to appear before them as no better than a tramp? He was a glib authority on the customs and habits of distant lands and he indulged his natural taste for colour and display, by wrapping around his middle, in place of a belt, a blood-red sash. This was fashion's highest decree in South America, he explained. 'What do you think they will say when we get there?' he asked Edevart.

Just outside the village he suggested that they stop and take a rest, so that they might not appear breathless when they arrived. He drew from his pocket a cigar for each of them—purchased in Bodø especially for this occasion—and he warned Edevart not to draw on it too hard lest he smoke it up ahead of time. 'But when we go past that hut of Karolus', make all the smoke you can!' he said.

'When we get home you must go in first,' said Edevart.

August: 'Why that?'

Edevart answered bashfully: 'I'd be so nervous, I couldn't.'

There lay the village silent and dark, barren and impoverished. Nothing left now of the wealth which had flourished here during the era of the herring, no paint on the houses, no dancing or merriment in the homes. What had the whole thing amounted to? One day of prosperity which never came again. But folk had been given a taste of it and then they became reckless and proud, gave way to their extravagance, smoked tobacco and learned to spit arrogantly. Ay, one day of prosperity which never came again—what had the whole thing amounted to?

Through the dismal darkness of a winter day came two of the village lads home again, extraordinary lads who would bring both light and warmth. Folk had eaten up all that the last year's Lofoten fishing had brought them and now were licking up the crumbs. From hut to hut they shuffled, exchanged trivial bits of gossip and shook their heads sorrowfully. Good folk, friendly folk these; but poor folk, lazy folk, too. Nobody earning any money, no herring now—just winter and winter's dark. . . .

But some there were who still kept up appearances—Store-keeper Gabrielsen had gone bankrupt, but he had saved enough from the wreck to give him a decent living and could even parade around with a white shirt-front hung around his neck. Ay, and then there was Sexton Johnsen and he was not so down and out that he couldn't smoke his pipe on his way to church on Sundays—but the reason that he could put on airs was because he received a steady salary, and could snap his fingers no matter how small the Holy-offering was.

August and Edevart came smoking into the village, past old Martinus' hut, past the hut Ragna's grandmother had left her—and there in the door stood Teodor staring! Past Karolus' large house where faces looked out of the windows, straight down the road to the place which was Edevart's home.

'How's this—I can't understand it!' said Edevart as he walked along. 'It seems so changed here! What's become of the hill?'

August stared, too. 'No, you're right about that—there used to be a hill over there, I remember it very well!' And when they arrived at the house, he turned to Edevart and said: 'Will you just take a look at this—here they've put stone steps!'

The entire family were inside—they had heard who was coming and they had all assembled for the occasion. Several of the neighbours were there too,—Ezra, that

winsome little dare-devil acrobat, two neighbour-women, Karolus himself and perhaps four or five others. As August opened the door he immediately saw that to enter with their sacks would be impossible—the hut was already overcrowded. So the lads had to leave their sacks outside.

Four persons arose to offer them their seats.

'Don't trouble yourselves—don't bother about us!' they cried with a wave of their hands, in order to appear modest and polite.

But they took the chairs left vacant by Joakim and Ezra who had hopped up on the table.

Silence and embarrassment.

At length Joakim speaks—he is sitting there on the table and dangling his legs, is as freckled-faced as ever and in a joking mood. 'How did you think you could get into the house with those heavy loads of yours?' he says.

Furtive smiles on the faces. Edevart's old father says admiringly: 'Ay, what tremendous loads they are!'

Joakim still full of mischief, in a stage whisper to Ezra: 'I see where we'll have to pull down all our buildings and put up larger ones!'

Karolus, Head-man Karolus, importantly: 'We must do nothing of the kind. *My* house is plenty big enough!'

The others thought likewise and hurriedly agreed with their leader: '*Your* house!—yes, that's quite another matter!'

The conversation turned to more common affairs. Karolus asked if they had come by sea or land and listened attentively to the narrative of their trip. Had they sighted any herring? No. How was the wind blowing outside the fjord? Northeast. The room being warm and stuffy, August now found it necessary to unbutton his coat, and there was that South American sash of his. . . .

This was a home-coming! Now it was not according to the Polden traditions to run outside to meet a returning traveller, nor to show him any sign of joy or of welcome—

no, such would be considered mere affectation. How easy it might be for such a demonstration to drift over into tender and delicate emotion—ay, even tears, and such-like embarrassments, the most shameful of all. Edevart had been a bit worried over the possibility that his father's feelings might run away with him and drag his own along with them, but they both passed the crisis successfully, helped, no doubt, by the presence of all these spectators. He was able also to speak to his sisters without making a fool of himself. 'How big you have grown—I was hardly able to recognize you!' he said. They both blushed and busied themselves at the stove and the coffee-pot.

After some time had passed, the neighbours began to leave. They had hoped right up to the very end that they might be allowed to see what the sacks contained, but neither of the pedlars made the slightest move to bring them in and open them. They had been given plenty of hints,—the inquisitiveness of those present was obvious; even Head-man Karolus said before he left: 'Ay, many and many an article must lie in those sacks of yours?'

'Oh, my, yes,' answered Edevart. 'Yes, yes, indeed. You'll come back before long and see?'

'That's one thing you may rely on!' said Karolus.

But they had already seen a great deal; folk could run here and there and tell others what great business men August and Edevart had become, how they each had a watch and gold ring, what elegant black serge suits they wore, and how they wore their hats on one side of their heads, and all about the boots they wore—boots trimmed with patent-leather!

The days slipped by, happy days in that little home of theirs, ay, gala days. Josefina from Kleiva was immediately put to work making new dresses for Edevart's two sisters; his old father went about in a new kersey coat with a couple of bank-notes in the inside pocket, and Joakim was paid back the last of his money—Edevart now owed

him not a cent. And now Doppen belonged to Edevart outright!

The settlement between the brothers was not transacted without something of an argument; both became angry, for each had his pride to consider—and if there didn't sit Josefina from Kleiva listening to every word that they spoke and drawing her own conclusions! Why then had Big Brother wanted to bring up this matter right then and there in the presence of a third person? Simply in order that his words might be heard,—publicly to elevate Joakim to his rightful position. Ay, and there sat creditor Joakim, freckled-faced and thinnish and poorly-clad and refused to understand the shameful circumstance of his brother giving him money.

'What do you mean by this?' he asked.

'That's what I owe you.'

'Don't be a fool!' said Joakim.

'Take the money,' said Edevart. 'It's the balance of the money I borrowed from you.'

'You didn't borrow anything. You gave me that seine. And besides that, you sent me some money from Fosenland.'

Edevart thrust the money toward him and said: 'I'm not going to sit here like a monkey and coax you any longer.'

And at last Joakim accepted the money, but he looked like a man who was just about to vomit. Oh, he was not going to lose as easily as that—he hurriedly planned his revenge. Suddenly and without warning he blurts out sarcastically: 'Welcome home from America!'

That hit the mark. Josefina from Kleiva bent over her work and chuckled.

Everyone in the village had of course heard that Edevart had intended to go off somewhere on a long journey—and so now there had been nothing to it, eh? The whole thing had been simply boasting and putting on airs. If

not that, what then? Josefina glanced up from her seam and listened.

Edevart's jaws were working slightly although he held nothing in his mouth. 'I gave that up,' said he.

Joakim: 'Ay, you gave it up. You were scared, weren't you?'

'Scared? Of course I wasn't scared, and you needn't think I was. I did something smarter than that!'

'What?' asked Joakim, unbelievingly.

'Well, well, didn't you see what I had in those sacks? And I have more in the boat!'

Josefina felt that it was time for her to step between them. 'Ay, and I suppose you've wool-hackles too?' she said.

Edevart: 'I've hackles in the boat, fine and coarse; just tell me which number you want.'

'Oh, what a lad you are, you Edevart!' she exclaimed. 'What a blessing that you came! For now that Gabrielsen is bankrupt, it's impossible to get a thing at the store!'

'I've a four-oar loaded to the gunwales,' said Edevart. 'I guess I've enough goods to last all the folk here in Polden a good long while.'

'Where did you get them?' asked Joakim.

'Get them? My goods?'

'Ay, for I hope you didn't sneak in somewhere and steal them!'

'I can't be bothered listening to you!'

'For then you'd be arrested,' continued Joakim. 'And then you'd be a pretty posy to have back home sitting here with handcuffs on!'

Josefina from Kleiva laughed and spoke up again: 'But sieves you haven't got, have you, Edevart?'

'Oh, haven't I any sieves!' he answered. 'Just come down to the boat with me!'

'Such a grand lad, you are, Edevart!' she said. 'Such trouble as I did have! That cow of mine, she has just

calved and I haven't any sieve—' And now it was Josefina's intention to come to Joakim's assistance and she did it very sweetly—he had lost the battle and sat there crushed and discouraged. She said.'Oh, yes, but that Joakim has done big things, too.'

Edevart: 'I suppose he's been lying out in the Vesteraal with that rotten seine of his.'

'No. He has carried stone after stone from the hill and has made some steps for the front of the house.'

'So, maybe that's what gave him that big belly and those fat cheeks of his!' said Edevart derisively. 'That was a good job for him!'

Josefina refused to give in. 'And when spring comes,' she said, 'and the snow is all gone from the ground and everything gets green and pretty, you'll be able to see all that Joakim has done—he's cleared that field of yours, taken out all the stones and turned every inch of soil and made the whole place fit to grow things in—'

'And planted salt there maybe?' said Edevart.

'Don't listen to him!' Joakim advised her.

But Josefina was nobody's fool, far from it. Like the good friend she was, she had noticed for the past two years what splendid harvests Joakim had been reaping from his reclaimed land, and she made it a point to praise him for this, and did all she could to call attention to him. It was a miracle how much fodder he had been able to raise on that little patch of barren soil. 'I don't see how in the world you managed it,' said she to Joakim.

Joakim: 'I read about it in a newspaper in Lofoten.'

'Ay, that's you all right, reading things out of newspapers and books and studying everything that's written down,' said she. 'There, Edevart, do you hear?'

Edevart replied that he couldn't afford to waste his time on such things—he had other matters to think of.

'Heavens, Josefina, how can you stand to talk with such

a numbskull! Why, he can't read a word in any book at all,' said Joakim, and hurried out of the house.

Josefina and Edevart continued to talk over the affairs of the village. Josefina knew everyone and everyone's business. What was it he wanted to know? Ragna? Hadn't he heard about her? She was married to Teodor now and already they had two children. That was quite a number for them. You see, they had no land with that little hut of theirs and kept no creatures, not even so much as a goat. But they'd get along somehow or other. Oh, yes, and over at old Martinus' place they were getting along very well, too, for now there were only three of them, you see. It was too bad that that cow of his couldn't calve any more, but she was as fat as butter and would make splendid beef —now he had a chance to take her over to the parsonage and trade her in for a good milk cow. 'And,' Josefina continued, 'You ask, as does everyone else, about how things stand with that Ane Maria. All we have heard is that she is getting along very well there in prison and has quieted down. She doesn't write very often to her husband, but the parson got a letter from the preacher at the prison and he says that she has turned very religious and reads the Bible from cover to cover and sings every psalm in the psalm book. What does Karolus have to say about all that? You must ask that brother of yours about that, for he does the reading and writing for the whole village here, I may as well tell you. But one thing is sure, she wants to have that man of hers there with her; she longs so for him, she writes, and she says that it's only right that man and wife should be together. But, Lord bless you, Karolus can't be put in prison very well, can he? For he hasn't committed any crime and murdered any one.'

Edevart: 'What do you think she wants of him?'

'Wants of him? That you may well laugh at!' answered

Josefina, herself breaking into laughter. 'She probably only wants to convert him! But now let me tell you something nice! Do you know that that sister of yours, Hosea, is to have Ezra? Ho! So you didn't even know about it? Oh, my yes, they're absolutely promised to each other. And I suppose I'll soon be making a wedding-dress now, that is, if you provide the material.'

'Well, well,' said Edevart. 'She could have chosen a far worse lad than Ezra.'

'That's just what I've always said! And now he's bought him a piece of land with a pasture from Karolus. He must have it in his mind to build there. Let's wish them good luck with it!' Josefina nodded solemnly.

'What do you mean by that?'

'No, I'll say no more. It's just that the bog lies on his place, that bottomless bog where the Skipper went down to his death!'

Edevart: 'Ezra was a fool to buy that.'

Josefina: 'He didn't want to buy it either, but Karolus, he wouldn't sell that piece of ground unless the bog went with it—he wants to be rid of the bog, and folk can't really blame him, either, since that was what got that wife of his into trouble.'

'Do you know what he gave for it?'

'No. But they say that Karolus made him a bargain.'

'He could have bought a place from me,' said Edevart. 'For I've a farm down Trondhjem way.'

Josefina shakes her head: 'Why Heavens above, you Edevart, have you a farm now along with everything else?'

Edevart, puffing out his chest: 'And it isn't such a tiny farm, either, if I do say it myself!'

During the winter the comrades wandered about from village to village in the neighbourhood of Polden, selling goods here and there. Customers they found aplenty, but

money was scarce and they frequently were obliged to let things go on credit, pending the return of the men-folk home from Lofoten. Those were days of heavy traffic along the road from Outer-Polden where the boat lay, but with the first signs of spring and the breaking up of the ice, the lads rowed their floating store in to Polden proper and there as close to the boat-houses as possible made it fast with two anchors and a shore-line! When the fishermen returned from Lofoten, Teodor was unable to refrain from ridiculing the manner in which the boat had been moored. 'Take a look at that schooner of Edevart's!' he jeered. 'He must be expecting a big storm out on the Atlantic!'

And now the young store-keepers went out to collect their money. In most places they met with success and once again they appeared with breast-pockets bulging with money. All well with Edevart now; nothing to worry about. He sent a remittance south and enclosed an order for more goods, for he had turned out to be a regular business man! But when two enormous boxes arrived from Trondhjem, he was at his wits' end to know what to do with such a heavy stock of goods.

'You ought to build you a regular store up here,' said August, always ready with an idea.

'Stop talking nonsense!'

'You think it's nonsense I'm talking? Can't you have a store right here in Polden just as well as Gabrielsen in that backwoods place of his where he sat and went bankrupt! Yes, you must build you a store, that's what you must do!'

Edevart answered that he couldn't consider such a wild idea.

His house gradually became a general meeting-place. The Poldeners didn't have so many diversions to choose from; the only one now was the old skipper from Ofoten who came with his cargo of fish to be dried, but even he

had been coming here year after year and had ceased to be a novelty. Otherwise the days passed without any excitement; Joakim at work sowing in that field of his, Ezra diligently clearing his piece of land and laying his foundation and planning out his house. But the most fun of all was to call on the village business men.

Well, well, Edevart's father was quiet and religious, but he was a tolerant old man none the less, and seemed to have nothing against having visitors in the house. Especially on Sabbath days after morning worship they came, and quiet, well-mannered folk they were, simply neighbours who had dropped in to talk over the bits of news they had heard in church. They wanted to know what the store lads thought about things, for here unquestionably were men they might ask about the new star which had been discovered in the heavens or the war between France and Germany. Take Edevart, for example, he owned things, had valuable goods and money, had commanded a sloop and made his mark in the world. As for August, hadn't he been around the world? Ay, men of importance these—August in particular. When Teodor, whose only claim to distinction was that he had a hernia, began to smile a bit to himself over one or another of August's tales, he was sat on by the others. Edevart pushed his comrade forward, boasted about him, asked him for advice right in the hearing of all, and demanded that folk respect him. So! Just let that Teodor try to pick a quarrel!

Edevart continually urged his comrade to recount his adventures, nodded encouragingly and helped him along with pointed questions. And he never interrupted him, not even when August shouted lies at the top of his lungs. As the summer passed, each Sunday afternoon was a time to look forward to and each visitor felt repaid for coming to hear August. One thing mystified them though: where had August learned to play the accordion? But he said

nothing to dispel the mystery which still enshrouded him. No, instead, he talked about trees with leaves of silver and manna which rained down in torrents, about ships with twelve masts and human beings whose faces were green and who lived four hundred years. . . .

'Did you ever see one?' asked Teodor.

Had he ever seen one! Ho, August had seen far more than that! Just mention any kingdom and country in the whole wide world and you'd find that August knew all about it. Edevart had himself held in his own hand a bunch of keys—eight keys, to be exact—which belonged off there in India! 'Wasn't that so, Edevart?'

Edevart nodded.

'Ay,' said August. 'And then you saw me after I was shipwrecked and had lost everything I had, but it wasn't many days, was it, before I went over to the fair at Levanger with a whole box full of pearls and diamonds and was the guest of the judge and the parson! Ay, Edevart, you know how it was?'

Edevart nodded.

Teodor: 'I can't make out where you get your money from!'

August patiently allowed himself to be interrupted while one of the other listeners spoke to Teodor. 'Ay, maybe you would like to know that, you Teodor, but it's no more any of your business than it's mine!' August beamed at this, opened that astonishing golden mouth of his and thenceforth gave his imagination free play. And, heavens, what tall tales he told! Edevart allowed him to carry off his triumph.

'What was the name of that king you knew out in India?' Edevart asked this simply that these good Poldeners might hear the sound of that marvellous Indian name.

But August was obliged to stop and think. 'King Achab, wasn't it? I don't remember now. How should I

be able to remember the names of all the kings and other people in the world I've happened to meet! It's more than any one person can carry in his head! But that reminds me of something that happened one bright, moonlight night—it was off there where the Columbia and Pretoria meet—'

'Where what meet?' asked Teodor.

August: 'O-ho, so you doubt me, do you?'

'Will you learn to hold that tongue of yours!' cries an exasperated listener.

'I simply asked him what it was he said met.'

'The Columbia and Pretoria,' continued August. 'Those are two rivers, like two enormous oceans they are and come rushing up against each other just as though they are angry and want to fight. You can hear the roar for ten miles around, and the spray goes up so high up in the air that it shuts off the sun and folk live in total darkness there. And now, you, Teodor, I suppose you are wondering what they do for light? And in a way, it's right that you should ask. Moonlight is all the light they have! But this moonlight is different from the kind of moonlight around here—you can't even think of them together, for it's brighter than the brightest sunshine we know anything about.'

'What were you doing there?' asked Edevart.

August paused to think. 'Ay, I lost the thread of my story,' he said. 'Oh, yes, it was there that I was wading through gold, wasn't it?'

'In gold?' cried Edevart, himself interested.

'God bless your soul, of course it was! Just plain, unadulterated gold! I couldn't understand it myself but there it was when I looked down—gold all over my boots! I stamped on the ground and I kicked my boots together, but it wouldn't come off. But then I knew what I would have to do, so I ran up along the river as fast as I could until I came to the ship and I jumped aboard and told

the captain what I'd found. But nobody would have believed it if they hadn't seen it themselves there on my boots.'

August paused. The listeners waited tensely, 'What else? What happened then?'

'Happened? It happened that neither the captain nor the others would turn out and go back with me that night. But early next morning when we did go back, the gold was gone.'.

'That was a hell of a thing!' declared Teodor, excited. 'So you had all your trouble for nothing!'

August looked sharply at Teodor and answered: 'So that's what you think!'

'Ay, what else are we to think?' asked the other, misled by the speaker's confident manner.

'No, you see, I wasn't the silly fool that you take me for,' said August. 'Since they wouldn't turn out and come with me when I wanted them to, I simply lay awake all night long thinking what to do, and in the morning I took them out and showed them all around but I didn't show them the right place.'

'You don't mean it?' gasped the listeners.

'Oh, don't I mean it? It was my gold, wasn't it? I didn't need to give it all away to somebody else, did I? No, thank you!'

Several of the listeners said he had done the right thing—they would have done the same thing themselves; but the tireless Teodor still objected: 'Then why did you tell the captain in the first place?'

August replied seriously: 'That was my duty.'

Grand pause. Every man sat there and thought his own thoughts. That must have been how August had regained his means, that time he was flat on his back and in need of money; ay, that explained how a shipwrecked sailor could visit the Levanger Fair with a supply of diamonds in his pockets. That devil of an August! He even

had a gold mine somewhere out in the world where he could walk in gold almost up to his knees—'twas plain God's truth he had told.

'But did you find the place again yourself?' they asked.

'Ay, ask me if I didn't!'

Well, well, that tenfold devil of an August! There was more to him than any had imagined! But folk, nevertheless, didn't take everything he said without a grain of salt. Now, if only he could show them the boots he had worn! 'What happened to those boots of yours?' they asked.

'The boots? The captain got them. "Let me have those boots, August," he says to me in English. "Here they are with my compliments," I says to him also in English. And from that day on I didn't have to lift my hand to do a bit of work on board and I had all my meals at the captain's table.'

Another grand pause. August himself was thinking and sat with folded hands. Then suddenly he shook his head, as though memories were crowding in on him: 'He sold them afterwards in Sacramento, I heard, and got all kinds of money for the gold that was left on them. There was a great pair of boots, all right. All the goldsmiths in the city had to pool their money to buy those boots!'

'What part of the world did all this happen in?' some one asked.

August looked around at them all; then he said shrewdly: 'Well, well, so you'd really like to know?'

Oh, no, one couldn't very well expect him to give away this secret, for then any one who wished could journey to the place and go walking around in his gold, Teodor in particular; his greediness would get the better of him, poor fellow, and he would lose no time before setting out.

'Do you go there once in a while, or haven't you been back there since?'

August: 'I've been back there just once since—I go

there only when I have to. But then, you see, you must take into consideration that you can't get there whenever you want to. No, for the folk who live in that particular country aren't righteous and God-fearing folk like we are. The forests there are alive with savages and wild animals and every step you go, you take your life in your hands. It's hardly right to speak about it, but it's one of their customs that they must kill every Christian that they meet. That's all there is to it. And after that they eat him.'

'They eat him?'

'Ay, cook and eat him.'

'Did you ever see them do it?' asked Teodor and got up from his seat, he seemed to have grown restless suddenly.

August: 'Since you ask, I suppose I'll have to tell you. Yes, I've seen them do it. One of my comrades and I, we went ashore from the ship. We were lying there taking on pearls, and there were palms and fig-trees and all kinds of fruit trees growing round about. But I'm getting away from my story. The savages captured that comrade of mine—at least a dozen of them there were surrounding him—naturally they didn't dare touch me for there I stood with a loaded revolver in my hand. "What do you want?" asked the comrade of mine. "Wah-hoo-wah!" they cried, and that meant that they wanted to eat him up. "You're a bunch of rascals and bandits!" said he. He wasn't at all afraid of them and he grabbed one savage and punched his nose straight back into his head so that all he had left was a hole there in the middle of his face. I stood right there and saw it all. There were so many of them, they overpowered him. They hit him on the head with their war-clubs and it didn't do any good for him to keep on calling them bandits and swine. So then I shot one of them. But even that didn't do any good, for there were so many of them. My comrade, he

yelled out to me that they were hitting him pretty hard now and that his head was beginning to hurt him. So then I shot another of them, but they got him down on the ground and fell on top of him and I was afraid to go on shooting for fear I'd kill him, too. A while after that he was dead. Then the savages jumped and danced and hopped with joy and I managed to get off with my own life, simply by walking backward with my revolver pointed at them until I arrived at the ship. Then the whole ship's crew armed themselves and we went ashore in a terrible fury and attacked their camp. Ay, but it was too late. They had cut our comrade up into pieces and had put him on the fire to cook.'

August's listeners shuddered, and Edevart's aged father spoke up nervously: 'But you didn't shoot them, did you, August?' he asked. 'Surely you didn't shoot them?'

August: 'What else could I do? Besides, they were heathens.'

'Ay, I suppose so,' said the old man. 'But they had immortal souls just the same.'

'The devil himself can tell what they have—I don't know. But anyway I didn't shoot them to death,' said August. 'I just shot them in the hands and fingers and feet, so they really had no reason to complain.'

'That's just what I would have expected from you, you August!' nodded the old man of the house, his mind now at rest.

Edevart realized that his friend was in need of support, for he noticed that not only Teodor but Ezra and even Joakim were having their doubts as to August's story, so he spoke up: 'Ay, great things and many you've been through, you August. And it's more than any of us can ever understand!'

August clasped his hands behind his neck and yawned indifferently. He declined the compliment by answering

that it surely wasn't anything worth boasting about—he was accustomed to such things now. Such minor matters as murders and deaths and similar violences merely tended to break up his life's monotony, he would have it understood. And before long he'd have to be making a bit of a tour around the world again to have a look at some of those possessions of his.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WITH the coming of summer, money was again scarce in Polden and the district roundabout, and the young merchants ought really to have gone on their way some time ago; but one week after another went by and they continued to stay on. All was well as far as they were concerned, treated as they were with friendliness and respect by all—elsewhere it would have been far more difficult for them to get along. Furthermore the old Ofoten skipper was now back in Polden with a cargo of fish to be dried and with the coming of autumn the summer's wages would be paid and folk would once more have money in their pockets. Ay, time would take care of every need.

But August began to be impatient because the days were so monotonous. No lad to remain lazily in bed was he; he never overslept in the morning; instead, he went sauntering about the village, mingling with the ledge-workers, with a word of advice for all. He paid a visit one morning to Ezra who was toiling away at that new place of his, commented on the building site and discussed Ezra's plans for a house.

And oh, yes, August had seen far worse beginnings in the course of his travels; in fact, Ezra showed remarkable good sense in the way he had worked things out. But Ezra mustn't be forgetting to dig a ditch around the outside of his house, lest moisture seep into his potato cellar. Also he must set his foundation stones for both house and barn deep into the ground to prevent the frost from forcing them out of place. At the present moment Ezra was at work laying the foundation for his barn.

August said: 'Your barn won't be big enough.'

Ezra replied that he didn't expect to own a whole herd of cows.

'But you mustn't think of putting up a little dog kennel like this! Look here, you must build it as large again. Then when the time comes for you to have four cows you'll be able to take care of them.'

Ezra laughed aloud: 'Where do you think I'd ever raise fodder enough to feed four cows?'

August cast a glance around him and like a flash gave birth to an idea. Oh, that August, how many times he had been forced to use those clever wits of his to get himself out of a tight place, and now once again he brought them into use. 'You will simply drain out that bog down there!' said he.

Ezra glanced up in alarm: 'Are you fooling?' he asked.

August wasn't fooling, far from it, said he; that idea of his could hardly be called a joke. But it took a good many words to convince that little stay-at-home Ezra that the idea was even worth considering, and even so, Ezra felt no enthusiasm for it. Nevertheless, it was fun to hear this worldly-wise sailor lad explain things the way he did.

But after all was said and done, what good would it do, even if Ezra were to perform this task?

Couldn't he see through it himself? There he had on his property a large piece of excellent swamp land and simply by draining it out and turning over the turf on the surface, he could any day make it into a rich and arable field. There was not a stone to be found in the whole bog—it was virgin soil, the richest of mould, and he would be able to cultivate it the very year it was drained. 'Come, let's go down and have a look at it!' said August.

They picked their way through woods and clumps of juniper, August pointing and lecturing; excited he was,

and the frozen blue of his eyes had now changed into flame. They halted down by the fish rocks, eternally streaked with moisture and slime from the bog. They looked out at the treeless expanse of marshland and Ezra, breaking into laughter, said: 'I'd have to dig pretty deep here, wouldn't I?'

It was anything but certain that he would, thought August; there was only one place where the bog had no bottom. He would have to dig one ditch completely around the bog, another deep ditch straight through the middle of it and then, slanting on an angle into this, any number of smaller ditches. There was slope enough here and from the highest point straight down to the sea a rushing river of water would flow. 'Just think how all this waste land here would look if now it was green with growing things!' concluded August. 'Why, you could raise enough here to keep three cows!'

'Have you ever seen it done?' asked Ezra.

'Many times and in many lands.'

'And dug up a corpse as well?'

August paused, uncertain. 'A corpse? I couldn't say exactly as to that. Why do you ask?'

'I'm asking if you think I ought to disturb him that's buried there in the bog. Naturally you're not thinking of that?'

'Ho!' cried August. Now, in truth, there was no one who had so much to fear from the dead man as he himself, for it was he who had cheated him out of money that summer when he had kept track of the ledge-workers' time and he who had helped himself to the watch and sea-boots which belonged to Skaaro. All right. But hadn't he given the Skipper a handsome gold ring? August took time to regain his poise and then put a question to Ezra. 'What harm can he do you, that Skaaro?' he asked.

'None, I suppose.'

'And isn't it a fact that he is in the habit of crying out

from the bog and wants to be dug up? He's scaring the whole village!'

'He hasn't done that once since Ane Maria went to prison.'

August: 'It would be better all around if we took him out and laid him away in the churchyard.'

A week went by and then something unpleasant for Ezra took place. One Sunday afternoon just as folk were on their way home from church, a cry was heard from the bog—a shriek! Oh, God, and it was loud and unearthly and harrowing! The young girl who was herding the sheep on the slopes behind the marsh, ran home in a frenzy of excitement and fainted on the doorstep. The Outer Polden church folk also heard it and jumped for their lives. The whole village was terrified and Ezra came running with his tongue hanging out because he had heard the cry from his new place. All evening long folk discussed the weird event—it was no light matter now that the wailings from the bog had started in again! Poor Ezra, he couldn't expect to go on building after this; that new place of his would never be safe to live on! And as for the others, would there be a single person in the whole wide village of Polden who, after this dreadful day, would be able to sleep at night? It couldn't have been that bull of Karolus' that had let out a single bellow, nor a loon, which had cried out but once and then been still. No, it had been a soul crying out in its agony, a soul in search of peace, that and nothing else. The thoughts of all turned to Skipper Skaaro.

'I think we ought to drain out that damned bog and get rid of it,' said August. 'What do you think about it, Karolus?'

Karolus frowned upon the suggestion; he felt little desire to go on talking about the corpse and thus be reminded of his wife's misfortune. 'I don't think we should disturb the dead,' said he.

August: 'If we can find him and lay him away in the churchyard, he'll be in holy ground and we'll never hear another squawk out of him. That's what I think about the matter.'

Some nodded and agreed with him, others thought that digging up a corpse was a ticklish business, that folk had no right mixing up in the Judgment of the Lord. The matter evaporated right then and there—ay, even though it involved the whole of Polden's peace of mind, the matter simply evaporated. And even Ezra, whose peace of mind was most keenly involved could not continue indefinitely to go about with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. Gradually his excitement abated within him and he later resumed his home-building. And, strange as it may seem, he followed August's advice and increased the size of his barn to twice that on which he had previously planned. And what did he have in mind?

Trouble now, trouble for poor old Martinus, a sad affair indeed. He had just got his new cow from the parsonage and her name was Fagerlin; sweetly she followed the herd and gave a bit of milk morning, noon and night, a promising cow in every way. The other cows seemed to dislike her though, and butted her with their horns and tried to keep her away from them. But that was always the way at first with a stranger to the herd—and time alone would remedy that. But a day came which proved to be Fagerlin's last—she went down in the bog like Skaaro. It was too bad, but it couldn't be helped—rescue arrived too late. Poor Fagerlin, see there, she is a stranger and unfamiliar with these pasture-lanes—she has not, like the others, learned since calfhood to shun the spot where the bog has no bottom! Ay, and in she falls—perhaps even butted in by one of the home cows; God knows what really happened—but, anyway, she fell in and was lost. And now what about poor old Martinus

and his family. Patiently he accepted the tragedy and consoled himself with the thought that in any case he didn't have many more years left to live. But folk met together and talked the thing over and discussed what they were to do.

'Don't you think we had better drain the bog?' asked August.

'Will that bring that cow of Martinus' back to life?' they asked.

'No! But do we want that Skaaro to have a cow in his grave with him?'

They all shook their heads and thought that the situation was really terrible, but was there after all any help for it? What was there they could do? Again the matter evaporated. But Ezra now had gone over to August's side and was anxious to have his marsh land drained—that hell-hole, that blot upon God's landscape! Ezra too, argued in vain. So there was nothing left for him to do but to continue building his barn large enough for four cows, since he had already laid the foundation for one of that size.

But at length something happened which turned public sentiment in favour of August's project. On Sunday afternoon people heard more wailings from the bog, this time two cries in succession.

It was now no longer possible to disregard the matter—something had to be done! The cries had been heard at the same hour of the day as on every previous occasion, and folk reminded each other that this was at the very hour of the day that Skipper Skaaro had gone under. There could be no doubt that he was begging to be liberated. That he had cried out twice in succession to-day must have meant that he was in the depths of despair at having to share his grave with a cow!

The shepherdess raced home as before and the villagers returning from church heard the cries themselves

this time. Ezra came dashing in, threw himself, discouraged, on the floor and informed them that now he must abandon all work on his building, for he couldn't think of living his life out in such unholy surroundings.

Head-man Karolus at last pulled himself together and went to consult with the parson, taking care to have Joakim with him lest some matter should arise to require the use of a pen or prove too complicated for a mind such as his own.

Activity there in the bog, many men, ay, all the men in the village at work there! It is a bright summer day, no danger apparent. A matter of great importance occupies them. August is master of ceremonies. He has stretched a long rope in a straight line from the sea right up to the top of the ridge, the line which the ditch is to follow, and he has stationed men all along this line, and he himself is hard at work and sparing himself no toil. August has no red sash about his waist and no cigar in his mouth now! The sweat rolls down his face and it seems that he must be filled with desire to do this act of kindness for the lamented Skipper Skaaro; ay, that must be why he is so eager. He blows his nose in his fingers and wipes them on his trousers, and he doesn't care how much muck he steps in with those elegant boots of his, those boots trimmed with patent-leather.

The men waste no words as they go on working and when they do speak, their voices are soft and hushed, for the work they are performing partakes almost of the nature of a ceremony.

As they draw near the fateful spot, they drive their spades more and more carefully into the mud, for they never know what they may at any moment strike. Ezra is in the lead and skims off the top layer of turf; behind him moves a whole line of workmen. Less and less of the men's bodies is visible as they dig themselves deeper and

deeper into the earth and the men at the end of the line are almost entirely hidden from view.

Ezra reaches the bog's most treacherous spot. He lays out planks and boards in front of him to stand upon as he digs and now the whole marsh heaves with every thrust of his spade. He looks behind him to make sure that he will have instant help if necessary, then moves forward and soon arrives at the danger spot, ay, has it right under his feet. He strikes nothing but sheer mud with his spade; he pushes the treacherous green tussock aside, but the sludge immediately levels the hole—each mark of Ezra's spade is obliterated at once; like digging in porridge it is. He passes over the danger spot and works his way along, his feet now on firmer ground. Reaching the end of the rope, he steps away to allow the next man to work in his place; then he walks back and takes up his position at the end of the line, for so August had ordered.

At midday a broad, dark fissure could be seen stretching straight across the bog, and by evening the work was about half finished. Folk spoke with hushed voices to each other that night as they returned to their homes; they had now dug down to the depth of four spades there in that dreadful place where the bog was supposed to be bottomless and had struck nothing at all but mud. Down through the ditch, water was already flowing with a lusty gurgle.

In the morning the men resumed their work.

Then something happened.

The man who at the time was at the head of the procession of diggers let out a cry and leaped out of the ditch. Had he struck something? Ay, something solid with his spade, something that felt like cloth. Teodor, who was next in line pushed himself forward with a scornful sneer on his face. Oh, that was the kind of lad that Teodor was! He drove his spade into the mud a couple of times and uncovered a roundish object. 'Ho, this is only

a tree root!' said he, taking hold of it with his hand and attempting to pull it out of the mud. But the object wouldn't budge, it stuck fast. Teodor lost his grip; he began to claw the mud from around the object and the discovery he now made caused him to fall over backwards—he had shaken hands with a dead man!

Well, well! Teodor became ill, undertook to relieve himself from both ends at once and lay back exhausted. August strode forward and pushed past him.

Of all these men he alone had the courage to spade around the corpse in order to bring it forth into daylight. Oh, August was no man to shrink from an eye-to-eye encounter with a corpse!

It was remarkable how well preserved the Skipper was. The mud had protected him against decay and no smell other than that of mud came from him—even his clothes were intact. And there on his finger was the gold ring! His arms were outspread and had to be forcibly bent back into their normal position; one of his boots was missing. The corpse had rested on an underground rock hardly three fathoms beneath the surface of the ground. The rock was hollowed out in the shape of a kettle into which water now was bubbling through a hole in the bottom. An underground spring!

They carried the body to dry ground, rinsed it of all the dirt of the bog and covered it up. August chose two men from his crew and told them to go home and make a coffin.

The greatest tension was now over and some of the men began to hint that now they might as well quit work. Ezra was eager to keep on and for excellent reasons; he went to August and complained. 'What's that?' exclaimed August. 'Stop work? Not to be thought of, far from it! This bottomless pit of Hell must be drained off completely so that it won't ever again be able to suck down a living thing!'

So they worked until evening of the second day and had cloven the bog with a tremendous deep ditch through which water flowed like a river. The bottom of the ditch lay on bed-rock for almost its entire length and only the underground kettle still remained full of mud and water. Old Martinus' cow was not found, but they discovered Skaaro's lost shoe.

After they had quit work in the evening, the question arose as to who should watch over the body. Everyone declined this duty—if it wasn't exactly dangerous, one could at least call it harrowing. Ezra was willing to watch, if he could have another man as company, and Teodor, who had recovered his health, stepped forward. He must have felt it incumbent upon him to atone for his former wretched conduct—he had been down to the sea and made himself presentable.

Nordland's light summer night! The two men paced back and forth—they were not afraid, far from it; they had volunteered to keep watch, out of the goodness of their hearts, so no ill could befall them. Besides that, Ezra felt a secret joy that his rich bog was being drained—a joy that had something of piety in it.

Finally they tired of walking, and sat down and dozed. The sun had set behind the hills and shadows fell about them; they buttoned up their coats. Before they went to sleep they assured each other that Skaaro had had nothing against either of them and would do them no harm.

Well, well, but a corpse was a corpse, none the less, and not a skipper. Well, well . . .

Teodor woke with a start; he had been dreaming.

'What is it?' Ezra got up at once.

'It's nothing. But look, something seems to be moving down there!'

'What's moving?'

'That covering of his. We must go down and see.'

'Ay,' answered Ezra. But he made no move to go.

It was now after midnight and only half light; they stood still and stared. 'It's something reddish,' said Teodor. 'It's some kind of an animal.'

Ezra: 'It's a fox, you'll see!'

'Ay,' said Teodor also. 'It probably is a fox, but—'

'We must go and see,' whispered Ezra.

'Ay, that we must. H'm. But suppose that it's the Devil himself?'

'What's that?' asked Ezra and shuddered. 'You don't mean that.'

'No, I don't know,' said Teodor. 'But you know just as well as I do that the Devil can go about in all kinds of shapes looking for some one he can swallow up; can't he just as well be a fox then? And for that matter, I've heard of such a thing before.'

Ezra became uncertain: 'It's many years ago now that Skaaro went down in the bog and all that time his soul has been in Paradise—so why should the Devil be coming after him now?'

Teodor gave no answer.

'Or what do you think?' asked Ezra.

Teodor: 'H'm, what do I think? That animal seems to be acting kind of funny. Skaaro wasn't all that he should have been either when he was alive, you needn't think he was. He committed many sins in his day, sins that I know about. And that might just as like as not be the Devil coming after him now.'

But Ezra was a bit of a dare-devil none the less and, picking up a heavy stone in each hand, he began to walk down to where the corpse lay.

'Are you going?' Teodor asked and followed cautiously on behind him.

At the same moment an animal leaped away from the corpse; like a streak, a reddish flash, a fox leaped through the air. Ezra threw a stone. A little squeak came from the fleeing animal, perhaps only of fright, but in any case a

squeak, and to Ezra this was a great source of satisfaction.

They went over to the corpse; a stench of decay came from it now and they were obliged to hold their noses. Teodor had become more courageous, for his doubts had now given way to knowledge; it had been no more than a fox, a common, everyday fox; if it had been the Devil himself, surely the rascal would not have run away like that—he would have vanished into thin air right there on the spot or else turned himself into an ant.

'Will you just look here at what a mess that swine has made of the corpse?' said he.

The fox had been trying to tear through the clothes that encased the Skipper in order to get at the body—it had left the face untouched, but had clawed and bitten the clothes, ripped open buttons and buttonholes, torn a corner from a pocket. Oh, what a ghoul a fox can be! The lads set the dead man's clothes to rights as quickly as they could and covered him over once again. They promised each other not to fall asleep again that night.

'It was lucky that I woke up before more damage was done,' said Teodor and took unto himself full honour for saving the corpse.

In the morning some of the Poldeners returned to their work—others said they were tired of digging ditches. They had been willing to help uncover the corpse and rid the village of the ghastly cries that had come from the depths of the earth—but further than that, no. 'But what about that cow of Martinus?' asked August. 'Hadn't we better dig for it so that we can skin it and make use of the hide? And what if some animal or even human being should go astray in the bog again?'

He went over and uncovered the corpse but the powerful stench sent him reeling back. Luckily for the watchers, August noticed nothing wrong with the corpse; he returned to the bog, marked off at a slant two side ditches

which were to run from the underground spring straight up to the top of the ridge, got the workers under way again, and managed everything. Digging the left ditch they ran across Fagerlin, the cow. She was in excellent condition and they immediately washed the mud from her and began the work of flaying her. Late in the forenoon the two men came with the coffin and took Skaaro's corpse away; it was high time they did so, too, for it was in the last stage of decay—it now seemed as though only the clothes were holding it together.

All this time while August had been so active, Edevart was completely lacking in enterprise. He frittered away his time, put on airs and was lazy, and even sported around with the girls a bit. For instance now, he had not even joined those who were ditching the bog. It was an important piece of work which would benefit the entire village; but no, he didn't take a spade in his hand, excusing himself with the statement that he owned no working clothes, and letting it be understood that he had no interest in the village, anyway. What had come over him? This was the village of his birth! That was all well enough, but Polden was no longer his home, he no longer belonged here. He could claim many places for his home now. If he were to engage in ditch-digging anywhere, it would be on his own farm down in Fosenland. And there, at least, he wouldn't have to dig up dead men.

It was August's doing and no one's else, this draining out of Ezra's marsh land, and a grand undertaking it was. One could say that at least half of the work had been accomplished with the digging of the large main ditch and the two small diagonal ditches; the bog had already begun to settle and dry out. But there still remained the work of lining the ditches with stones—work which would take months and years.

But the beginning had been made and Ezra was full of enthusiasm—August encouraged him with word and deed,

while Joakim helped him at every opportunity. They each had a flair for farming, and when Joakim had need of help to remove large stones, it was always Ezra he had turned to for assistance. In return Joakim would put in a full day's work in the bog whenever he could. They progressed slowly in this manner but with a sense of steady achievement. The two lads got along well together, as was to be expected. It was no longer any secret now that they were to become brothers-in-law—Joakim's sister Hosea already went about with a gold ring on her finger, so that matter was settled and sealed.

But now August found himself with nothing to occupy his attention and went sniffing about in search of something new. He again approached Edevart on the matter of building a store in Polden—see there, that boat of his, there it lay anchored right off the village and was loaded down with goods. But it couldn't lie there over the winter and be frozen in the ice! This time Edevart listened; he had, himself, been thinking the matter over.

'Well, but then you must begin right away before winter comes! What the devil are you waiting for?'

'Ay,' said Edevart. 'But I'll have to have building material first.'

'As to that,' said August, 'a letter this very day, this very hour, so many beams, planks, boards of such and such dimensions . . .'

Joakim wrote the letter.

And now it seemed that even Edevart got back his courage, energy and ambition. He was up early in the morning and worked till late at night on the place where his building should stand. Edevart was not without intelligence and the things that he had seen and heard at Knoff's place of business down in Fosenland now stood him in good stead. Together with August and Joakim he dug and walled up a cellar large enough to take care of a barrel of lamp-oil, a little keg of pipe-tobacco, a tub of

soft-soap and the other items he would have to keep downstairs. Here again August raised the objection that the foundation was altogether too small. But Edevart wished to begin on a small scale and be sure of himself.

When the building materials arrived, it was no time at all before the two coffin-makers had erected the little store which was no more than a simple shed built on to the side of the house—the simplest kind of framework boarded inside and out, no stove, no vain display, no carved woodwork. That very autumn Edevart was able to take out his trader's license and begin selling goods from a permanent place of business.

Everything turned out to his advantage; the old skipper from Ofoten had completed the drying of his cargo and paid off all his ledge-workers—there was money in circulation again.

But here is August again, and what's the matter with him now? Only that he's idle once more and is more restless than ever, sour and ill-natured, and hard to get along with.

'What ails you?' asked Edevart.

August wanted to pull up stakes and be gone.

Edevart suggested to him that he take a trip up north along the coast with his pedlar's sack—he could easily go up as far at Tromsø and goods would be sent him whenever he ran short.

August shook his head.

Then what did he want to do?

He wanted to cut loose from here, he said.

What did that mean?

Oh, well, simply that he did not care to go on as a pedlar any more.

Edevart did not want to let him go and offered him a partnership in the business, they would share and share alike, both in the operation of the store and what peddling they might do.

August turned this down. No, he simply needed a change and that was all he could think of these days. He had been accustomed to wandering about, changing his occupation whenever the fancy took him, and now he had reached the end of his rope as far as Polden was concerned, and was consumed by that old restlessness of his.

'You could just as well go up to Tromsø and back,' said Edevart. 'Then make another trip south, stay over wherever you want and work or rest just as it suits you.'

'Ay, come back over the same old route!' said August.

'Why not?'

'And meet the same folk and talk the same things over and slap my boots with the yard-stick and have a hell of a good time, eh?'

'You said you liked it once!'

'Did I? But now I want to cut loose from all that.'

'What do you want to do then?' asked Edevart.

August answered with his usual words: 'Don't worry about me!'

But he had no plans for the future on the day that he set out.

And so it goes; ay, so it goes—everything goes, but some things go under. It cannot be otherwise.

Edevart continued to tend store in Polden. He had built his store up against the house in which he lived simply to save the expense of building a fourth wall for it; and as the result of this, the old house had become twice as large as before and for size almost rivalled that palace of Head-man Karolus'. Edevart did not object to having people respect his place of business so he painted the whole building white, just like the parsonage, and now he lived and worked in such elegant surroundings that he even saw to it that out in the yard the straw from the packing cases was always swept up. His old father went about at times committing the unpardonable sin

of showing how proud he was of his clever son. Occasionally he would say: 'If only that mother of yours could be here now!'

Winter arrived and things became dull and quiet; no money now that the men-folk are off in Lofoten. Quiet days for Edevart, for all he does is eat and sleep. Ay, and why not accept the gift of a bit of leisure and value it accordingly? Nine o'clock in the evening and the whole village lies asleep, dead silence indoors and out; no one keeps awake listening for something to happen.

Edevart continued in his generosity; during the difficult winter months he helped more than one poor soul to get along by giving out a pound of flour or a half-pound of coffee on credit; and little Ragna who had become the wife of that Teodor, even got white lump-sugar which was not written down on her bill at all.

'But now you must come over and have a cup of coffee at my place,' said she.

He answered: 'I'll be over this very evening!'

It couldn't happen otherwise; it was both stupid and unkind of him, but he went over to see little Ragna who lived in her grandmother's hut; ay, went there through the dark nights and remained with her until dawn. The village folk knew it, of course, but he made no apologies —he was a man of means, he was rich. Didn't they all have to go to Edevart when they were in need of a pound of flour or a half-pound of coffee? And considering it from Ragna's standpoint, wasn't it a feather in her cap to be chosen in preference to both Beret and Josefina from Kleiva! Ay, that's the way it was.

And Edevart himself? He had grown less and less careful of what he did or how he did it; little Ragna was not the same as Lovisa Margreta—no, never would there be one the same as she and never would he forget her. But 'Happy journey to her!' as August would say—here was Ragna at his very elbow and her mouth was so

pretty when she laughed! His soul was torn to tatters. He felt no special thrill at being in her presence, but he could not leave her in peace. Lovisa Margreta was perhaps never for a day out of his thoughts, but he had given her up. What else could he do? But again, what else could he do but think of her night and day? She had left her mark upon him, a deep and lasting mark; years lay between them, but weak and divided in his heart she had left him that last night aboard the sloop *Hermina* and weak and divided he had always remained. He might easily have learned her address when he had been down south, but he had postponed that—he had lacked courage and initiative to go through with such a thing. And now here he was back home, going about composing letters to her in his head, letters which never were sent, no, never even written. Pleasure and joy he no longer knew; he had almost forgotten how to laugh—a youth powerful of body he was but crushed and bowed in his soul. Once August had said to him: 'You have the downright look of a corpse! Why don't you go and get buried?'

Oh, but he wasn't altogether dead as yet, no, not exactly stone dead. When the men returned from Lofoten in the spring, he helped old Martinus to buy a new cow by going credit for him. Great joy for poor old Martinus! But then at the very same time here was Teodor, stupefied to find that Ragna was with child.

'Where have you been to get it?' he asked darkly.

'Ha, ha, where did I get it?' answered Ragna. 'Right here at home.'

'Who can I thank for the job?'

She laughed again and repeated: 'Thank?'

'Who did it, that's what I want to know!'

'Is it in fun you're asking me that?' she answered. 'Weren't you home for a visit yourself at Easter time?'

'Ay, that I was, but that was only three weeks ago. And just see how you look now!'

Silence.

'I'm going to know!' he screamed and jumped up.

But Ragna had been a bright one back in her school days and a bright one she had remained all her life—she could figure things out in her head and she knew how to answer to her own advantage: 'Ay, then it must have been before. You left for Lofoten in February, and it's the third of May now. Just count it up yourself!'

She bewildered him; like a fox, she had more than one way out of her den; he could get nowhere with her and had to sit down again. And later she even had the conscience to twit Teodor and make a fool of him because he had been so ready to distrust her. Such a bright one was little Ragna!

And so it goes, ay, everything goes. In the long run not even Teodor could go on complaining. All the menfolk were happy over their rich harvests of fish in Lofoten; they had earned a good bit of money this year and could visit Edevart's store with coins between their fingers. When Teodor came to pay what his good wife owed for, he was agreeably surprised to learn how small the amount was and how economical she had been during the winter. Oh, Ragna was a clever wife, and that's all there was to it.

Ay, money in Polden once again—for a few weeks at least—and Edevart replenished his stock and did a thriving business. He needed an office now, nothing grand or pretentious, but a little office with a pane of glass in the door leading into it. And to tell the truth, he also had need of a bedroom where he could sleep by himself at night—the house had been crowded enough before he had come home. Ay, Edevart must be building again. And now his old father repeated more than once: 'If only your mother had lived to see this day!'

All in all, an unexpected bustle and activity there in Polden—the village had opened one eye from its sleep and

stretched itself a bit and in a few of the villagers' heads intelligence began to stir. Ezra was a good example. That shrewd little rascal Ezra, he continued to drain his bog in the way that August had taught him, and now that he had earned money off in Lofoten, he undertook to hire a horse with which to cart stones. And that was a good thing to do, for now he could begin lining his ditches with stone and filling them in with earth. Where the bog had lain before, he now saw stretching before him a dry and fertile field. He spaded it up, manured it and harrowed it and then he seeded it with barley in order, you might say, to prove his own convictions. And in three weeks the field was green with barley sprouts. A miracle and a blessing there in that former swamp.

A thousand thoughts in his head, Ezra sweated at his work. He observed at once that the field would after a bit require more manure than he could obtain in the entire village. What then? He must have creatures. But to keep them, if no more than a single cow, he must have a barn. All right, but was that all there was to the matter? Who would look after the cow when he himself would be off in Lofoten earning money? That would be his wife's duty. His wife, Ezra's wife! Why, God bless us all, he wasn't yet twenty years old! But assuming that that sturdy Hosea said ay to the way things stood, where would she live in this new place out in the wilderness? She couldn't live together with the cow, could she? Thus he must first of all see that a dwelling was built. But that was no simple matter—and all this just for the sake of manure! Taken as a whole, there were times that Ezra was completely snowed under by all his thousand thoughts!

On Ascension Day as he was bustling about, thinking of all manner of ways out of his difficulty, he noticed that Joakim was up to something new, had been doing queer things for the past few days: he had spread seaweed over the entire top of his field, seaweed from the beach, common

everyday seaweed. That devil of a fellow, Joakim, he seemed to know what he was doing! He sniffed into books and papers and read all he could lay his hands on during his days of idleness off there in Lofoten, and he had become wise. Why, perhaps already he knew even more than did the parson who had confirmed him. But seaweed spread over a meadow, over a meadow where grass was expected to grow?

'Ay,' said Joakim. 'But that's not all! I've taken seaweed and thrown it into every furrow of that barley field of mine, covered it over and sowed on top of it.'

'Is that like manure?'

'So they say. But you don't have to believe that yet.'

'Who told you about all that?'

'I read about it last winter. It's an old trick, and has been known here in Norway for over two hundred years. Now I want to try it out.'

'A good thing it is that I happened to hear about it,' said Ezra and already began to ponder. If Joakim's trial were successful, all Ezra's plans would be altered. His building plans, for instance, could wait over until a more opportune moment; he could wait with that cow of his, he could postpone his wedding. Why had Joakim been so silent about his discovery? Ezra said: 'You read about it last winter and never said a word about it!'

'No, for I didn't want to put false hopes into you. I wanted to wait and see for myself how the thing turned out. And anyway you needn't think that a single treatment of fertilizer will do much for that bog of yours. You must mix seaweed with something else.'

So that was the way it was! Again Ezra would have to change his plans. He said, discouraged: 'No, I didn't know there was so much nonsense about it. And I can't make out either how you think you can spread seaweed over that meadow of yours. You'll have it in your hay when it's ripe!'

Ezra walked away with his head bursting with thoughts, —but no wiser than before. From now on, in order to be on the safe side, he would work on that dwelling of his— so he got him a man to help him and set to work hammer and tongs. He must get his roof on before the first snow-fall.

And now something happened; a thing simple in itself it was, but its consequences were great: Edevart received a letter from America. The church folk brought it back with them from the post office, a yellow envelope made of tough leathery paper on which were many stamps, forwarded from Knoff's down in Fosenland. Edevart went into that new office of his to read the letter and when, after a long while he had finished, he walked into his new bedroom with it and laid it under the pillow on his bed.

The letter had been written a good long time ago and had been held up many months in the south. Well, well! Edevart was never a lad to leave a forwarding address behind him! But at last he got his letter. So it goes, so everything goes!

So here now was this letter from distant America, and the careful little words it contained were oh, so blessedly like her! She hadn't forgotten him, the letter read, but she had wanted to see how things would turn out before she undertook to write him. It was very different here from what it was back in Norway, but they were all well, that is, those that had been left behind, after Haakon had gone west. He never wrote. Both the boy and the girl had grown up during all these years, but neither had been confirmed, as such was not the custom over here. The boy was working in a *factory* and earning quite a good bit of money, the girl as well, who ran a *spool machine*.

'Please pardon these words if you don't understand what they mean,' the letter continued. 'Everyone in the city here speaks only English and the children never use a word of Norwegian

any more. But the youngest one I was telling you about, she is a little girl and her name is Haabjørg, just as Haakon wanted it to be. As for myself, there isn't much to say, although a long time has gone by, except that I can't get used to it here and haven't been able to get used to it for a single day, but I did it for another's sake so that he could be different here in a foreign land. Yes, I long to see you again and Doppen which was my home, and now you are living there, it is so strange. But the children, they are big and grown up now and don't want to go away from here, but I'm going to take little Haabjørg and come back to you and Doppen. What do you think of this idea if I can arrange it? But maybe you are married now and living there at Doppen and so then I wouldn't come. I just happened to be thinking of you this afternoon and so I am writing this. Affectionate greetings from all of us but most of all from me.

'Lovisa Margreta Doppen.'

Now what was Edevart going to do? Answer her, answer her right away! August, he would have telegraphed, he would—he had always talked about telegraphing to America now that the *Great Eastern* had just finished laying a telegraph line right underneath the Atlantic. But as far as Edevart was concerned, this was a fairy-tale too wild to be believed. Since he was too much embarrassed to ask Joakim to write the letter for him, he tried to write it himself. Why not? Hadn't he kept records aboard the sloop *Hermina*, and wasn't he even now keeping books for that store of his? Ay, but this was a different matter, an entirely different matter and he spoiled many sheets of paper before he finally gave it up. In his discouragement he happened to think of his little sister, not the elder, but Paulina, she who had last been to school and who was clever indeed at making her letters. He would pay her well for writing this missive for him—and for keeping still about it.

They were shy with each other, this brother and sister, for according to the best traditions of Polden, it was improper ever to allow the least trace of emotion to appear upon one's face—ay, better that one should sink through

the earth! Paulina was willing to help him with the letter, but all the time she was writing, he sat with a sarcastic expression on his face and pretended to regard this Lovisa Margreta off in the land of America as just a bit out of her head—he was writing all this nonsense merely to make her feel good, she wasn't coming home at all events. He went on dictating and told her just where he was living, told her that he was keeping store in his home village up north and that he had visited Doppen but once, at which time he had found a blanket she had left for him, and thanks very much for the blanket. 'It was so lonesome and sad to stand there on the place,' he wrote—'and not to hear anything but the waterfall and not to see——'

'You!' suggested Paulina.

'You? No!' said Edevart. 'But all right then, put that down—you'd maybe make her feel good if you put that in.'

Paulina wrote. Oh, that little Paulina, she wasn't so far off! There that youngster sat, pretending that life was a mystery to her, but just the same she had a good nose to sniff with!

'It was good news to hear that you are coming back,' Edevart continued to dictate, 'and I shall get everything ready for the day that you will stand once again in your old home place.'

Paulina: 'Don't you want to say that you are longing for her?'

'No! Are you crazy? That is, unless you want to put it down just for a joke. She ought to know that it would be nothing but fooling. Go ahead and put it down, if you say!'

Paulina wrote and asked: 'And "affectionate greetings" to close with?'

'H'm! After all that other stuff you've written!' answered Edevart, jerking his head to one side. 'No, for now I'm sure that she'll be going all over the city to show that

letter to folk, for she is really pretty badly out of her head.'

He gave his sister a whole silver coin for the work she had done for him and commanded her to be as silent as the grave.

The summer passed. Joakim's hay crop was richer than ever before and Ezra, to his astonishment, discovered that there was no seaweed in the hay. 'Then you must have raked it out beforehand!' he said suspiciously. But Ezra was mistaken, the seaweed had rotted almost away—the brown remnants of it would cling to the stubble. Naturally, though, they would have to be careful about raking up the hay. But there stood Joakim's harvest, an abundance of long-stemmed timothy.

'I never saw anything like it!' mused Ezra.

But Ezra himself had not put in a profitless summer; that little barley field of his there where the bog had lain before seemed every Sunday more and more of a miracle to the church folk of Outer Polden—what if one day they were to see the entire bog under cultivation! In addition to his farm work, Ezra was also able to do a bit of building. Wasn't that his little dwelling house over there with a door and three windows and smoke curling out of the chimney at noon when he made himself coffee? Ay, and hadn't that same Ezra, in a moment of mad enthusiasm, gone after his hay barn as well, with hammer and tongs? There was no stopping him and he had become mere skin and bones, but he never seemed weary. However, he had put up no more than two rounds of timber when he had to stop work on his barn. Surely this barn of his was too large, altogether too large; why, it would be large enough to house four cows and a horse—think of it, a horse!—in addition to a few smaller animals. Vanity and foolishness in broad daylight, that's what it was! Why, even Head-man Karolus owned no more than four cows

and a horse! And what enormous quantities of lumber it would take to build such a barn as that! No, Ezra had not figured on that and now he had run out of material. He laboured and perspired and in his excitement forgot to use common sense. Even were he able to complete the stables, think of the materials it would take to put up the hayloft, and until he had a hayloft, his stables would be without a roof! Oh, what a muddle the whole thing was!

One evening he went to old Seaman Martinus who was a good-hearted wise old man and had lived his whole long life without wealth or position. To him Ezra went and said in a discouraged voice that now he wouldn't be able to go on building any more this year, no, now he must call a halt to his plans.

'Ay, ay,' answered Martinus. 'But a long long way you've come in such a short time.'

'It isn't such a short time,' said Ezra. 'It's two years now since I got the piece of land and began working at it.'

'But here you are, and you're not a very old boy. I mind well the day you climbed up the rigging on that sloop of Edevart's and lay across the mast-head, and that wasn't so very many years ago. Ay, and here you are now, a grown-up man with a piece of land and a house on it and all. Are you thinking that that's nothing at all?'

'The fact is,' said Ezra, humbled, 'that I could have built a good bit further before Lofoten if only I'd had the materials.'

Martinus slowly thought this over. 'Now the first thing you must do is to give thanks to the Lord for the health that is in you, then He will advise you just what to do. When I lost that cow of mine, I got a good cow-hide, and now this spring I got a new cow. Here I am and I haven't paid all I owe for it; ay, that I haven't done, but I'll just put that in the care of the Lord and then I'll be paying

the rest of it after Lofoten, you'll see. But that Edevart was a good man and stood credit for me, and now there are three in this house who give him our blessings——'

Well, well, talk and more talk—all that the wise old man said, Ezra could just as well have said himself. But he didn't do that; he had young blood to drive him. Early one morning he was seen to hurry out of his house and go dashing in through the woods. He was gone for some time and when he returned, his face was dripping with sweat. He had been off to see Store-keeper Gabrielsen and had run all the way there and back. Ay, he had young blood to drive him. And store-keeper Gabrielsen had gone bankrupt and his place was either to be sold or vacated; on his property stood many excellent farm buildings and Ezra had it in mind to buy him one of these buildings, tear it down and transport the lumber by boat down the fjord to Polden to be used for his new barn. That was his idea. But hadn't Ezra forgotten to weigh the matter over? Oh, he had weighed it over enough—he may have omitted all the usual idle talk, but he had worked things out in his head all right, and, after a sleepless night, during which his head had seethed and swirled with ideas, he had sprung out of bed in the early morning and hurried over to open negotiations.

Store-keeper Gabrielsen was unable to sell any of his buildings separately. Furthermore, he was furious that some one should come to look his place over. 'Go see the Sheriff and talk to him about it!' he said. 'He'll kick you out, I'll bet! What's the meaning of this anyway, a Poldener come up to look my place over!'

Calling on the Sheriff, Ezra received the reply that he could not sell single buildings from the place, but would have to sell the place complete.

'Who do you think there is who will buy it!' asked Ezra.

The Sheriff did not reply.

Ezra held forth to the effect that this was no place where one might expect to do business, there was no village here. The village was down in Polden and vicinity and Edevart had a store down there.

'There's something in that,' mused the Sheriff. He asked: 'Have you money to buy the house?'

'No,' answered Ezra. 'But I'll be making some at Lofoten.'

There was nothing very certain about that, mused the Sheriff with a smile. That depended upon the will of God.

Ezra: 'And it depends a bit on me myself as well. In case I'm unlucky fishing, I can still split fish for others, or take a berth on one of the ships. In any case, I won't be coming back home with an empty purse. And if the Lofoten fishing is poor, I'll go up and try my luck in Finmark.'

'So that's what you'll do!' said the Sheriff. 'Ay, but are you sure you'll go on living all that while?'

'Living?' Ezra answered without a trace of doubt in his mind, or a trace of a smile on his lips: 'Ay.'

Then the Sheriff laughed aloud and said: 'I'm beginning to believe that you'll be getting what you want!' He liked this young fellow who was so self-confident and so excited that he would let nothing stand in his way. 'But even so, could you offer a bit of security?' he asked.

'Security?' Ezra could always offer security and a good bit, too! He had land and a house on it, and the Sheriff ought only to take a look at that fertile field he had made from what had before been a bog! No one had ever seen anything like it! 'And if you will come along with me and have a look, we'll go to the place where it's driest, and I'll carry you over the worst places,' said Ezra.

Then the Sheriff laughed loudly; downright amused he was and he held his sides as he laughed at this little slip of a lad who wasn't even grown-up yet, but who thought

he could go about with a sheriff in his arms! 'You're able to look out for yourself, that's plain.' he said. 'H'm—but what had you thought you'd be giving for the house?'

Ezra answered: 'I'll give what your best judgment tells you it's worth.'

That touched the Sheriff. Fumbling and drawing forth some papers, he said: 'I have here the tax assessments on all the buildings. And by law, I ought rather to hold an auction and let the place go to the highest bidder. But I don't know.'

Ezra: 'That would take such a long time for me, and I need it so badly this autumn.'

'We couldn't very well sell before the auction for less than the assessment figure,' the Sheriff muttered to himself. 'But it might well be that I assessed that particular building too high. That's possible. Altogether too high perhaps, since the place will very likely have to be split up and all the buildings disposed of piece by piece . . . Give us a day to think it over,' he said to Ezra. 'I'll talk it over with the other assessors. I'll send you word . . .'

And ay, Ezra got the house and borrowed that eight-oar of Karolus' to transport the lumber home and began to build at once with the help of two men from the village to hasten things along. Everything was now forging ahead.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EDEVART received a visit from the old skipper from Ofoten whose fish-sloop was back again in Polden. He had finished drying his cargo and now he was ready to stow it back into the hold. Soon he would have to be paying off his ledge-workers and he was afraid he would not have quite enough money—now if he could borrow a few dollars from Edevart——?

He got his money.

They fell to talking together; the skipper was a bit depressed, for things had not gone so smoothly for him this year, said he. During the first month at Lofoten when it appeared that the fishing was going to be poor he had feared that he would not be able to get a full cargo and so he had bought at high prices. He ought to have waited six weeks before starting in to buy, he confessed. Later when he saw the prices dried fish were bringing at Rønneberg's in Aalesund and at Nicolai Knudtzen's in Kristianssund, he became a bit worried.

He was an honest and reliable old Ofotener and Edevart felt sorry for him. 'You have a vessel and cargo and ought to be able to stand a bit of a hard knock, oughtn't you?'

'I don't know,' the skipper answered thoughtfully. 'I have a son who has been out about the country a good bit peddling, and he's cost me quite a deal of money. I don't know just why things went so badly for him—it may be simply that he's not clever enough for business—but, at any rate, I've had to get him out of the hole a good many times.'

'What's his name?' asked Edevart.

'Nils. But the end of it was, he had to give up trying to do business and come back home again—I have him working on the farm for me. It was the only thing I could do.'

Nils—of course! So that was where that impudent Mattea had got the money which she had sent him along with an impertinent letter. He tried to encourage the skipper, assured him peddling was a ticklish business, at best—that it was far more uncertain than trading in fish with a vessel—all a skipper had to do was to sail south with his cargo and exchange it for cash in hand—the amount might be large or it might be small, but at least it was cash in hand.

The skipper looked down. He did not wish to appear richer than he was, he explained, and the fact was, he did not have a full cargo this trip—his hold was only about two-thirds full. How would Edevart like to go into partnership with him to buy up fish next winter?

Edevart shook his head, but was flattered by the suggestion, nevertheless. Fish trading and shipping were the life of Nordland's trade—he would never be considered anything except a store-keeper unless he played some part in one or the other. Edevart hesitated, but finally confessed: 'No, I haven't means enough for that.'

'I've heard that you have land and a house down south,' said the skipper questioningly.

'Ay, that I have.'

'Why, then you've means enough. I merely mention it. . . .'

But Edevart kept his head. 'No, I couldn't think of it,' he said, 'I couldn't do it at all.'

'No, no,' said the skipper. 'It was only a suggestion. And now as to that money you've been good enough to loan me, I'll send it to you immediately, before I pay any one else.'

Perhaps he was letting a golden opportunity slip

through his fingers, but Edevart had no lingering doubts. What, mortgage Doppen again, now that any day or hour he might be leaving for the south to get the place in readiness—was he out of his head? Doppen, that little green cove where the waterfall murmured, where he had risked his life on the cliffs behind the house—because some one had been standing below and watching him!

But the days and hours became weeks and months; quiet and monotonous the time was now, the men folk off in Lofoten, no business to speak of and nothing to do but eat and sleep. The village lay lifeless and all that were left now were women and children and old men. Last winter he had been able to slip over to Ragna's hut with a little coffee and lump sugar, but this no longer appealed to him; no, no, he was through with all that sort of foolishness now. He had no one to talk with, for he was too lowly to mingle with the snobs and too snobbish to mingle with the lowly. He received no more letters from America and was unhappy and disagreeable because of the delay. From August, he had no word either. He was so utterly alone that he might easily have died without any one's even noticing it. He made a trip to Lofoten for no other reason than to go away for a week or so, but he found nothing there to cheer him—the fishing was poor, the fish buyers were complaining, and the fishermen were complaining. Ay, and during the last storm at sea, Karolus had lost a man from his crew—old Seaman Martinus.

'There you are,' said they. 'He served out his time; all his days he sat there at the tack, and now the Lord didn't want that he should go home to Polden poor and empty-handed like the rest of us!'

Ay, well; but Edevart had gone credit for his cow.

He returned home still full of bitterness, and all winter long simply frittered away his time without turning his attention to anything. There was no right or justice in the world.

Karolus and a few of his men came home for their Easter visit—Joakim, Teodor and Ezra—naturally Ezra, who was wanting to see his sweetheart and that new home place of his. The fishing had turned favourable at last and the Ofoten skipper was laying in a cargo and would come to Polden again as he had in the past. If only Martinus had lived, he would most certainly have been able to pay the balance he owed on his cow.

With the passing of Easter, Karolus was ready to set sail and return with his men to Lofoten, and there was nothing now to stand in his way. They had all gone to church on Easter Monday to please the Lord and all that. It was on this very Easter Monday that the church folk returned with a letter for Edevart. A yellow letter, a heavy letter, ay, heavy and stiff, in an envelope tough as leather—her photograph lay inside. What now, was there really no right nor justice in the world?

He left home at once although there really was no need for haste. As he journeyed southward, each point that he passed along the coast was familiar to him and recalled to his mind how once he had commanded a sloop and had followed this very course. He slept but little, for his heart was pounding as it had not done since the days of his youth. On board the steamer he happened to hear that the landing place had at last been transferred to Knoff's magnificent stone dock—the ships could no longer pass it coolly by now that the wooden pier at the old steamer stop had been blown away by a storm. The hostile director down in Trondhjem had been of the opinion that they should land their passengers in small boats again as they had done before, but the steamer captains were opposed to this and the governor of the district exerted his influence for Knoff. Furthermore a certain young lad appeared, one Romeo Knoff, ay, went straight to call on the director, appealed to his sense of personal decency and all in all made a splendid impression. The lad was not

arrogant like his father; instead of ridiculing the director's ideas, he listened to them humbly and attentively and seemed almost to subscribe to them. An affable lad, indeed —a born diplomat, with a business head on his shoulders —on the whole, a perfect trader. 'He won the concession,' said folk on board. 'Now the steamers come to him as they should have long ago.'

Edevart was pleased to hear of young Romeo's victory.

They arrived in the evening. With twinkling lights ashore and on board, the steamer came gliding into the fjord and nosed her way into that dock of Knoff's. Store-clerk Magnus came aboard with a handful of papers and was, therefore, the freight agent. There was very little freight from the north to be put ashore, but any number of things to be put on board and transported south to the cities; ay, butter and hides and wool and empty barrels and carcasses of beef. It seemed that the whole of Fosenland had awakened to new life and activity.

Edevart recognized from the deck many old acquaintances and among them, strange as it may seem, one whom he had seen many times before, one of the longshoremen —August? Ay, August!

Edevart could have been bowled over by a feather! August, too, was filled with astonishment and it was some time before he could open that golden mouth of his. 'What the devil—you here?'

'Ay, and you here, too?'

'Ay.'

Magnus came up, nodded to Edevart, made himself important and loudly ordered his dock hands about. As soon as the ship had steamed on her way, Magnus went walking up the road with the mail bag.

'That baboon!' said August, laughing behind his back.

'What's the matter, don't you like Magnus? But first of all, you must tell me what in the world you are doing here!'

'What am I doing here?' answered August. 'Oh, I just happened to tumble off the ship here one day, and here I've stayed ever since. I remembered all that you had told me about the place and I could see from the ship what a big busy place it was, and so I came ashore, although I had a ticket to Trondhjem. Happy journey to that! That was over a year ago, ay, quite a bit over a year. But what are you doing here? I suppose you've come down to have a look at that farm of yours you've always been telling me about. Ay, everyone here knows you and all I hear is good things about you.'

'Why didn't you write me?' asked Edevart.

'Write? No, but it was me that forwarded that letter from America to you last year. Ay, if it hadn't been for me it would have been here yet, for that Magnus is a silly fool. What did the letter say?'

'The letter? Mere nonsense.'

'Ay, I could see it came from a woman,' said August. 'Well, well, they must be having better times over in America than we are here. I'm thinking of taking a little trip over there myself one of these days. No, why should I write you a letter? This is no kind of a place for me to stay in and I don't want to be here a day longer than I have to. And I thought of telegraphing you that, too. Ho, so you've come down to have a look at that farm of yours? Well, well, there's likely to be a thing or two to be done before spring comes. No, why should I stay here any longer? That Romeo is a good bright lad—all the rest of them, too—old Papa Knoff and the Madam. But that Magnus, uf, what a clown! He's scared to death of a mouse! Come on, let's get out of here.'

'Can you leave the dock like this?'

'Ay, the rest of the lads can do the bit that's left to be done,' answered August, care-free. 'I can't be bothered with it.'

And now August is already tired of being a longshore-

man—ay, let it go; he is thinking once more of moving on. 'Don't worry about me!' he had always said. Oh, no, he couldn't stand still; his heart was restless and versatile. He was no learned professor, no master of research, but he could move from one thing to another and, since he was not lazy by nature, he generally gave a good account of himself—a bird of the wild, a bird on the wing, wherever he was he still could begin from the beginning. . . .

He continued to talk as they walked along: 'I've never given you any cause to be ashamed of me here at the trading station, you may be sure of that,' said he. 'I talked first with Romeo and told him about myself, told him that I've been around the world and commanded a sloop and could talk Russian and all the rest. Romeo, he liked what I had to say and agreed to let me stay on here, but he told me to go into the office and speak to that father of his. And so I did. The very next morning it was. I washed myself in three waters and put on my watch and gold ring and I walked right into the office. The old Papa, he liked me pretty well, too, and was friendly to me and said: "Good morning, Captain!" Then I knew that Romeo had told him all about me, but I wanted to be honourable and so, to straighten things out, I said: "Don't let's use such grand words!" I told him as how I was only a seaman and a pedlar and could speak many languages and had done farm work down around Trondhjem —ay, that and all the rest. "But," says I, "Captain I am not." "You've commanded a vessel," says he. " 'Twas only a sloop," says I. "That's the same thing," says he. "H'm, and now you want to stay on here for a while? That's fine, for this is a pretty big place you see here, and it just happens that I'm in need of just such a man as you who can be foreman in charge of everything and boss all the work both down at the dock and there in the warehouses and do a bit of work here in the store now and then when it's necessary. If you can do that, you can stay on," says

he. And here I've been ever since. But wait until you hear about that dung-pedlar Magnus! He got jealous of me because I was raised so high and was foreman over him and all the others, and ever since that day he hasn't been able to get along with me, that baboon. A clerk in the store, and scared to death of a mouse! I'll have it out with him one of these days, for I know that he took that watch of mine.'

'That isn't possible! What?'

'It looks like it, though, but——'

'And the ring?' asked Edevart. 'I see you're not wearing that gold ring of yours any more.'

'Oh, that!' answered August. 'No, I know where that is. But he certainly must have taken that watch of mine the time we were out fishing together.'

'Fishing?'

'Just for fun, just once. That was last summer; fine weather, the water was quiet, and so we went out to catch us a mess of fish for the Boss. While we were fishing the wind came up, and you know just how I am when I'm in a boat. The wind came up good and strong and it hailed and the sea got real nasty. Then I got scared, but that dung-pedlar Magnus, he sat there and laughed at me. Did you ever hear anything to beat that? And when I threw myself down in the bottom of the boat and hung on for dear life, he howled up to heaven and laughed at me and made fun of me. But just wait, I'll have it out with him yet, let him count on that. But it was on that trip that I lost that watch of mine.'

'Couldn't it have slipped out of your pocket?'

'Let him answer that! But if that's how it was, wouldn't we have found it there in the boat? No. On the beach? No. Let's go in and find out where you're to stay,' said August.

'I'll stay up at the cooper's where I always stay,' answered Edevart.

'Oh, so you want to stay up at the cooper's, do you? All right. As for me, I sleep in the room with the baker and get along real well with him—and everybody else, for that matter. Every one but that Magnus—ugh! And he even goes about spreading the news that I'm scared to death of the sea and have never been to sea in my life. Now, what do you think of that?'

And now once again Edevart went up to the cooper's house and arranged for a place to sleep. The cooper's wife bade him welcome and said it was good to have him back, for now that the cooperage was busy again, she had to sit alone all day long and had almost forgotten how to talk.

'Where is that husband of yours?'

'No wonder you ask. He's back working at the cooperage, of course. They're so busy there now that they have to work overtime finishing up an order that's going up to Finmark. At eight o'clock I take his supper over to him and then he eats and goes right back to work, and he doesn't get home until ten o'clock. Ay, much goes on here these days.'

Edevart heard all the gossip about people and conditions. Oh, no, the cooper's wife had by no means forgotten how to talk! Here now Romeo had at last got the steamers to stop at Fosenland and had become a rich man; his mother, Madam Knoff, now had a servant girl for each finger of her hand and was getting fatter and fatter every day of her life. And even Knoff himself now walked hither and yon simply for the sake of appearance and took out his watch and was always in a hurry to be going somewhere else.

'I suppose you know that Magnus who works at the store is now married? Ho, you didn't know that? Oh, yes, he got that Jomfru of his at last but there was a time when he had trouble enough with her, God knows. Once

it seemed that she was after Romeo himself, but he was only a child, you see, and his mother wanted to let Jomfru Ellingsen go. And then it was that she took that Magnus and still is the housekeeper here. They're living in the guest-house.'

'Do they have any children?'

'Oh, no, they're just newly married, you see. Why do you ask? They say she can't have children—whether there's anything to it or not, I don't know.'

'What was I going to say? Have you heard anything more of the folk off in America?'

'Ay. Some of them have come back again now that there's new life and activity here at Knoff's. But the others are still over there. They don't write any more and never send anything home—they're having a hard time of it maybe, or maybe even they're dead. But Lorensen, you know him—head store clerk, he was—he came back and was given his old place back again—the store is loaded down with goods and clerks and they even got them a new book-keeper now—my, but he's an elegant fellow—wears buckles on his shoes and gold glasses on his nose, and they say that he goes out walking in the evening with Juliet.'

'How are things going with old Skipper Norem?'

A look of sadness came over the woman's face: 'He died. They cut away and cut away in that mouth of his; first they took out his whole tongue and then they went further in. But it wouldn't have done a bit of good if they'd cut his whole head off—Heaven forgive my sinful talk!'

'How did he take it?'

'They say that he was brave right up to the last. Not that he exactly lay there laughing and making fun of his trouble—no, it wasn't that way he showed how brave he was. It was just that he lay there clenching his fists and looking stubborn and angry and refused to slip away from this world. He was in bed a long, long time, but in

the end, death came and got the best of him. He cost his wife a lot of money and they say that she had to mortgage the house and land. Who would have believed it? He who was so rich and had saved up so much! But that's the way it goes: "Vain fool, this very night thy soul shall flee from thee, and who shall call his own the gatherings of thy hand!" He must have realized that he had to die, but he lay there defiant and roared and beat his fists on the tray when they were feeding him his soup. He wasn't even human any more! I shudder when I think of it!'

'I ran into an old comrade of mine this evening,' said Edevart, to change the subject. 'A lad named August.'

'August? Ay, he's been here a few times and spoken of you, too. He has such a funny mouth.'

'He has gold teeth. He and I come from the same village up north. A very remarkable fellow he is; he's done a good bit of wandering out in the world in his time.'

'Ay, he's told us such a lot. But is he as afraid of the sea as they say?'

'August afraid of the sea! He couldn't have sailed around the world on all the oceans there are, if he was! But he is afraid when he's in a small open boat lying low in the water. And that's because he's been shipwrecked so many times and had to take off in life-boats with sharks and sea-lions and serpents on every side of him.'

'I only know what I've heard,' the woman hastened to assure him.

Edevart, sharply: 'You've heard only lies! Just stand him on a deck and you'll see how afraid of the sea he is, that lad! I've been with him myself on a vessel when it was pretty tough sailing.'

'He's a regular master at playing the accordion, though, they say; better than any one here, better than even Haakon Doppen was. But they can't ever get him to play. It was only once that he would play.'

'Better than Haakon Doppen!' sneered Edevart. 'Ay,

Haakon must bow his head there, all right! That playing of August's is plain magic, that's what it is!'

'Ay, poor Haakon, poor Haakon!' said the woman reminiscently. 'There must have been evil fairies at his cradle!'

'Well, what about him?'

'Oh, the bad luck he's had and all that. He got himself into trouble over here and then when he got over to America he left his wife and children and has never been heard from since.'

'Hasn't he been found?'

'No, never at all. He's held for dead. His wife got a divorce from him and can marry any one she wants to now.'

Edevart drew up his chair: 'How do you know that? Did she write?'

'It's told by those as have come home. Anders Vaade talks about it, Head-clerk Lorensen talks about it, everybody knows about it. She was freed from him by law. That must be the way things are done over there. You see, she's had a lot to put up with with that husband of hers, in prison as he was and all that. She has three children, but two of them are now grown up. She seems to be getting along pretty well now.'

Edevart had the suspicion that the cooper's wife was gossiping about all this simply to get into his good graces. She was well aware of the time he had spent with her at Doppen and of his fight with Haakon, and she must have known as well just where the man and his wife had got their passage money from. He had to protect himself and so he said indifferently: 'I'm on my way to Doppen right now and I'd be glad if Haakon or his wife would come and take back that farm of theirs.'

'Ay, that's right, you knew them pretty well, didn't you?' the cooper's wife suddenly recalled. 'What's this I'm sitting here forgetting? Is it wanting to sell you are?'

'Ay, if I get an offer. I've settled down up north where my home is. I have a store there.'

'No! Well, well, and you're now on your way to Doppen?'

'Ay, just to look the place over and do what work as needs to be done; I'm sure to find some of the window-panes broken. It's many years since I've been back there.'

In the store.

Edevart had had a bit of difficulty in going through the village without being seen—he no longer had any desire to be stumbling upon that Jomfru Ellingsen who would be sure to hold him up; nor did he feel any interest in meeting his old room-mate the baker just at this time. Not even the store was safe: he might run into old Knoff and perhaps be invited again to be his guest at the trading station, an invitation he would be obliged to decline. Edevart's mind was absorbed with a matter of importance; he was planning to put things in order at Doppen, inside and out; he would be needing many things from the store —kitchen utensils, chairs, bed-clothes—perhaps he would not even have money enough.

He asked for Romeo. He was not about, but Lorensen greeted Edevart in a friendly manner and was quite ready to talk with him. Ay, there stood the Head-clerk back again; he had forsaken the country several years ago and had tried his best to get along abroad, but it seemed that he had not tried hard enough. Wasn't he glad to be back home then? Oh, yes, he replied; oh, yes, he didn't mind it at all. But he wouldn't have minded either if he had stayed over there in America—a great country, America! Then why had he left it? Oh, folk must move about. Why had Edevart come back here? Why, because he owned a little place here which had to be looked after. Ay, but Edevart also had a place up north where his home was, didn't he? asked Lorensen.

Oh, Head-clerk Lorensen never lacked for an answer! He had come back simply to experience the feeling of coming back, but he wasn't sure but that he'd return abroad. This coming back hadn't been all that he had anticipated. And there were many like him. 'Take Anders Vaade,' he said: 'You know him? No? Well, but there's an Anders Vaade none the less. A lad who is pretty well off. His father's old and wants to get rid of his place; six cows and a horse, a fair piece of timber—well, well! But Anders Vaade keeps thinking it over and hanging back, thinking and hanging back. He can't stand it back home here; it seems so small and narrow, says he, he can't seem to get used to it. That's the way it goes. Over here the tiller of the soil comes to the store and gets his goods on credit, but in America when a *farmer* is out of money, he simply drives into town with a load of wheat and then he has money again. And that's the way they live over there. Hot meat three times a day.'

'But do they live any longer?' asks a bystander at Edevart's side.

Lorensen: 'I can't tell you that, but they live better.'

'How do they live any better? Is their health any better? Are they happier and more cheerful?'

'I believe they are. It makes a hell of a lot of difference in your state of mind whether you put your hand into your trousers pocket and draw out a handful of heavy silver dollars, or feel around with your forefinger in your vest pocket after that worn out *fireskilling* * you had there day before yesterday.'

'Ha, ha, ha! Ay, you Lorensen, it takes you to use words!' cried a woman.

Lorensen, stimulated: 'Take the thing all in all,—timber in the forests, wheat in the fields, hundreds of head of cattle grazing on the prairie. Over there more than

* A coin which was worth about 4 cents in 1870.

enough of everything, but here only the bare necessities. America can throw things away, for she's got more than enough of everything.'

'But live better, how do folk live any better?' asks the insistent bystander.

'Better!' answers Lorensen curtly. 'All the cake you can eat every day, all the pudding, all the sugar.'

'Ho, just the things that taste good!' says the bystander, disappointed. 'Goodies, raisins!'

Head-clerk Lorensen, impatiently: 'Just let me tell you this, Karel! You don't know what you're talking about, because you've never tried it! How many cows have you?'

'Two cows.'

'Two? There, you see? And how much of a family have you now, how many children?'

'Five.'

Then everyone in the whole store bursts into laughter and Lorensen laughs loudest and longest. 'Just keep on with it!' he says.

'We're getting along,' says the man. 'My two oldest boys are big fellows now. We also have many goats. And besides that, we have land, we sow grain and plant potatoes, we have gooseberry bushes, we have firewood in the woods and water in the brook—there's always smoke coming out of our chimney. Would it be better for us to give up all this?'

'Ay, ay, Karel, you're pleased with what you have and that's a good thing,' admitted Lorensen. 'You live in that little cove of yours and don't know about anything else in the world. Why did you come here to-day?'

The man: 'To-day I came to get me a couple of hoes and a spade.'

'Well, well. For you, those are good things to have, I suppose. But in America they spade and hoe with machines!'

'The one thing I can't seem to get you to tell me, although you know so much about the outside world is this: are people any happier over there?' asks Karel.

'I thought I answered you that,' says the head clerk in a tone of dismissal. 'They have heavy silver dollars and can buy whatever they want. That's how rich they are. But don't let it bother you, Karel—just go back to that cove of yours where you belong and when you need a hoe or a spade again, come back and buy them from us, for that's what we're here for. You're a good customer and you'll get along.'

The man: 'Some years ago that neighbour of mine sold his place and ran off to America with his wife and family. Were they any better off for it, do you think? I don't know, but I've heard one thing or another. And Haakon, he disappeared, didn't he?'

'Ay, and there stands that new neighbour of yours now,' explained the head clerk. 'There's the fellow that bought Doppen.'

The man shakes hands with Edevart and says: 'Well, well, well! And here I didn't get a good look at you, for if I had, then I'd have known you. I remember now, you used to work here in the store.'

'Ay, that I did once,' muttered Edevart.

The man: 'I rowed over to Doppen one Sunday and borrowed that crowbar of yours. I wonder what you'll be saying about that?'

'I'm glad you did.'

'No, is that what you're saying! Ay, there stood the crowbar looking so lonely and the whole place was deserted and I thought as how I would be bold enough to borrow it a bit, for I had some stones. But I'll be real careful of it, I said, and put it back in its place. And now isn't it funny that I should be meeting you to-day!'

Edevart explained that he was at the moment on his way to Doppen and asked how things looked up there.

Very bad indeed, he learned; no longer pretty there, nothing but weeds just as it had been when Haakon ran the place; many things would have to be done there. The man had not wanted to go snooping about another man's place, but he had noticed that the wind and rain had done a deal of damage.

'Ay, it probably doesn't look as good as my place up home,' boasted Edevart. 'Up there, where I've white-painted houses and a store and all. Do you mind if I go along with you, Karel?'

'I'll row you right in to the beach there and be glad to.'

The head clerk resumed his lecture: 'As to the fact that Haakon Doppen disappeared the matter stands thus! America is a large country, a whole section of the globe, and some folk are bound to go astray over there. I myself have been many places in the States—I couldn't stand to stay in one place all the time. But as to Haakon again —has that man ever done anything else but disappear? Back here he disappeared for years at a time, and over there too he disappeared at once. But his wife and children didn't lose anything by going—they even bettered their condition over there, earned a good bit of money and got on in fine shape. Clever woman that she is, she took right hold there in a foreign country and went from place to place and found just where she could get along best. What would have happened to her if she had kept on sitting there at Doppen weaving rugs? She was cut out for something better. After a few years she got her a divorce from her husband. And now, no matter whether he's living or dead, it's all the same thing.'

Busy days now, days of wild activity.

Edevart had got out of the habit of work and his whole body ached with fatigue. Nor was he a skillful housekeeper; he could cook his own meals after a fashion, but he was out of practice now and bothered as little as pos-

sible with cooking. There was no order to his housekeeping, and sometimes he went without food until he was trembling with hunger.

But as time went on, the tension within him relaxed and he arranged his days more intelligently. He saw that he really had no reason to dash at his work so wildly. Lovisa Margreta didn't come after all; perhaps she hadn't even set out yet—who knew? There were no more letters from her. He set panes of glass in the windows, washed and scoured the kitchen and the main room, straightened up the doors which hung askew on their hinges and repaired the roof and wainscoting. He had a good hand for work and all that he did was neat and secure. Inside he painted the doors and window frames, outside he tidied up the yard carefully and, with the help of Karel, cleared the largest of the stones from the fields.

'Don't you intend to sow?' asked Karel. 'There's enough manure here to spread on many a field.'

'I don't know,' said Edevart. 'Ay, now that you speak of it!'

He spaded up a good-sized piece of ground and sowed grain. He spaded up a portion of the slope, spread it with manure and planted potatoes there. He had never done a bit of farming before, but he had picked up a few of the rudiments during his childhood in Polden and these stood him in good stead now.

And then his toil was ended. Whitsuntide had passed and now summer watched over his growing fields.

He frequently went calling upon his neighbours. Karel and his wife were intelligent folk, pleasant to visit with and helpful about the farm. Their place resembled other farms in the coves along the coast—fertile fields down close to the sea, houses up on the steep slope, and woods and pastures behind the houses. But there was no waterfall here as at Doppen,—no music for the ear, and no

lofty mountains rising all around. No, Doppen was more beautiful.

Edevart wrote home to Polden to know if any letters had come for him. In due time he received his mail, but there were only business letters and such-like and nothing at all had come from America. His sisters sent him what money they had taken in at the store and asked if he intended to return soon. As for news, his sisters wrote that now Ezra had finished putting the roof on that barn of his and had bought him a cow in Outer Polden whose name was Rosemor. He was thinking a good bit about getting married now and wouldn't bide any delay in his plans.

But whom Ezra was to marry neither of the sisters told. Hosea was too bashful to write of such a thing.

Edevart felt homeless and rowed frequently over to call on Karel, or down to the trading station to see the cooper, the baker, and August. What was he to turn to? Naturally, he couldn't be going back home. The grain was well along at Doppen and the potatoes had begun to sprout; field and meadow lay green, but Lovisa Margreta didn't come. And her portrait wasn't enough. . . .

One Sunday afternoon he asked August to go with him out to Skipper Norem's farm, but August was unable to go—he was expecting the northbound mail ship and had his work at the dock. Edevart was tired of meeting the mail ship and leaving the dock disappointed. He no longer had the courage to station himself there with both eyes peeled for the steamer—some of the people had already begun to talk and to ask each other if he were expecting some one and who it could be. In any case, she wouldn't be coming to-day, and even if she did, she could wait. He would take a walk out to Norem's place and have a few words with those that were left; they probably thought it strange that he hadn't come out to see them before.

It took some time to walk out there and some time to

talk with the widow and hear each one of her troubles. There she sat and had been left behind—two of her sons had gone to America, and sent her money for the interest on the mortgage and an occasional off payment—the third son was at home, but he, too, had begun to talk of selling the farm so that both of them could go to America. What did Edevart think of the idea? She was old now and dreaded the long voyage and the unfamiliar life in a foreign land.

On the way back he heard the steamer's whistle; no great hope stirred in him, but he became restless none the less and quickened his pace. Ay, well, and there lay the ship at the pier; baggage and freight rumbling ashore, August hard at work. Some distance away stood a lady, a little girl clinging to her hand; she was speaking with a man in a linen duster and a hat cocked over one eye. Could that be she? Edevart did not wish to approach her; he went over to August and asked him who the lady with the child was. August listened. 'They're talking English,' he said and strode across the pier. August never cared to take a back seat and now he wished to show that he too could speak English. A few moments later Edevart saw the woman and the child turn and come towards him; a mist floated over his eyes and he felt her hand in his. He saw a smile of gladness on her face and he heard her speak as though from a distance.

Later he happened to remember that she hadn't even stopped to say good-bye to the man in the linen duster.

She asked how they were to leave the place.

'In a boat,' said he.

'Oh, so you have a boat!' said she. 'That's good.'

She looked around for her luggage and pointed it out; Edevart piled one valise upon the other and carried them down into the boat. 'Look how strong the man is!' said the mother to her little girl.

He took off his coat and rowed in his shirt-sleeves,

looked furtively at her the whole time, listened to what she said, answered her questions and felt bashful and infinitely tender in his heart. But indeed it is hard to row when one is filled with tenderness!

'This is Haabjørg I wrote you about. She speaks as good Norwegian as I do, we practised up together because we were coming home. She has been so good on the way here, sea-sick only the first few days. Later she went about the ship and became friends with everybody. Haabjørg, are you asleep? See the big bright birds? Those are sea-gulls. It's so nice to hear their little screams—that's the way they talk to each other. Have you been waiting long, Edevart? I didn't want to write again or to send you a cablegram either, but just to come myself without any—what do you call it?—come and surprise you, I mean. My, but you're big and handsome now!' said she suddenly and Edevart dropped his eyes and laughingly shook his head. Lovisa Margreta herself was embarrassed by her words.

'Ay, I'm much older now,' she said. 'Many years, many, many years older—I'm afraid to think of it. Do you know, it hardly seems to be you that I'm talking to, so strange it is. You wouldn't have known me yourself, would you? There I was talking with a person I knew and I was just telling him that I was on my way to Doppen. Then some one there on the pier heard me and came over and told me in English that you were the owner of Doppen. But you didn't know who it was when I first came up to you, did you?'

'Of course I did,' answered Edevart. 'For, you see, I had your photograph.'

She: 'My photograph—no, that was taken a good many years ago. I was afraid to send you a new one, for now I'm not as good-looking as that.'

He again laughed and shook his head as if he had never heard such nonsense in his life.

'Nowhere near,' she repeated.

'Don't talk that way,' said Edevart.

Of course she had changed; he, too, for that matter. There she sat now dressed in elegant city clothes, hat and all—on her feet high laced-shoes with patent-leather toes, about her neck a silk scarf, about her wrists little white cuffs—and all this gave her an appearance which was strange and unfamiliar. Ay, and her face had aged by several years and she was weary from her long voyage. And further than that? Further than that, nothing—absolutely nothing! She was pretty; she spoke with unfeigned tenderness in her voice and that was like a song in his heart and filled him with new joy and love—it was Lovisa Margreta again, his sweetheart, from whom had come his first kiss, his first passionate embrace, one ecstatic warm June evening years ago.

And as she sat there, was she too remembering all that they had been to each other that time? And could she, if she were, still look him frankly in the eyes? Edevart himself seemed the more uneasy of the two; no doubt he was unable to count himself sufficiently guiltless in the matter and he was filled with uncertainty and hung his head. And again he wondered, as he had wondered so many times during the years that had passed, whether on that occasion, young as he had been, he had not after all behaved himself foolishly and ignorantly. What then must she have thought of him all these years! The thought was unendurable. And what now, this very moment? Was he attractive as he sat there on the thwart? Wasn't he straddling just a bit too much? Was he rowing hard enough? But then, he mustn't over-exert himself and give her reason to smile!

She felt much more at ease than he; more natural and straightforward. When, because of the heat, he took off his hat, she cried out artlessly: 'Oh, if only I had such hair as yours!'

He was too bashful to acknowledge her admiration and tried to pass it off lightly: 'Do you want to pull it?' he asked.

'Not in the least!'

Little Haabjørg, also wearing a hat and city clothes, lay there trailing her hand in the water. It was such fun, something new for her, this luke-warm water slipping through her fingers. She was a bright little girl, too, and asked if there were fish here—big fish?—how big? She caught a jelly-fish in her hand and this filled her with glee.

'It'll burn her!' warned Edevart.

And the mother washed the child's hand and said: 'You'll be seeing enough of those on the beach at home, but you must never pick one up.'

'Why not?'

'They'll burn your fingers and make them swell.'

'What are they called?'

'Ay, what do we call them now?' asked Lovisa Margreta.

'Up north we call them seal spit,' answered Edevart.

The name 'seal spit' was repeated several times. Then Edevart said: 'It really isn't spit but then it isn't really a fish either. But just the same it's alive and is some kind of an animal!'

'It's alive and is some kind of an animal,' the mother repeated to the child, so that Edevart might seem to be teaching them things. 'Jelly-fish!' she cried suddenly. 'We used to call them jelly-fish here. But I remember that sometimes we used to call them "snots," too.'

Silence.

'Isn't Haabjørg big for her age?' asked Lovisa Margreta.

'Ay,' answered Edevart, looking down.

'And so lively and bright! You mustn't think that she is always as quiet as now.'

'No?'

'No. And she knows her letters, too, and can read everything. We brought some things along with us to read but the letters are like the kind they use over there. She can sing, too. Don't you want to sing something now, Haabjørg?'

'To-morrow,' answered the child.

'Ay, you're tired, but soon you'll be going to sleep with Mama.'

Edevart: 'But I fixed up a separate bed for her.'

'What have you—oh, such a one you are!'

'There was a crib there already!' said he.

'Ay, but the bed-clothes and everything else! You think of everything! How nice, for you see she isn't used to sleeping with me. And for that matter, I'm not used to sleeping with her, either,' said Lovisa Margreta, laughing. 'Well, well, so there is Karel's place; he used to be our neighbour. I used to stop in there many times when I was going along the road to the village. Have you ever been there, Edevart?'

'Ay, often. And I have also made a bargain with that Karel and his wife—for I didn't think I'd have anything to eat for such strangers as you.'

'We have a bit of food with us,' said she. 'What bargain did you make?'

'That you should eat your suppers there for a while.'

'There? No, no, that we won't do.'

'The child could get milk.'

'She doesn't need milk any more. No, we'll eat at home. You surely must have food enough there.'

'Ay, such as I've left,' he explained with a laugh. 'I've bought food for you several times now but each time I had to eat it up myself to keep it from spoiling.'

Lovisa Margreta herself laughed at this; then she was quickly sympathetic. 'Poor boy!' she said.

He, waving it off: 'No, but it wasn't so bad. I'll go after food to-morrow.'

'And you haven't a cow, then?' she asked. 'What, haven't you an animal at all?'

'No.'

'No, for you really don't live here, as you wrote. All you did was to throw your money away on us since you don't live at Doppen at all. Oh, I'm so sorry about it all.'

Edevart, embarrassed and annoyed: 'What are you talking about!'

'And now you've gone and wasted a lot of time just waiting here to welcome me home.'

Edevart held up his oars and said: 'I won't row another stroke if you go on talking that way!'

'The man's getting angry,' whispered Haabjørg.

Lovisa Margreta smiled at her and explained that the man really wasn't angry, simply kind, altogether too kind. 'There,—now we can hear the waterfall!' said she. 'We'll be home before long now.'

'Waterfall?' asked Haabjørg, when she heard this new word.

'A great big river falls down from above, much, much water, much white foam—oh, it's a very wonderful thing, you may be sure! We'll go and see it to-morrow. . . .' As they entered the cove and saw the houses, Lovisa Margreta exclaimed: 'Ho, how small it all seems!' She craned her neck and stared.

'Is that where we're going?' asked Haabjørg.

'Ay. But how small it seems! Heavens above, but it's strange to be seeing it again! Ay, there it all is—' She mentioned each place by name: 'The cottage, the barn, the storehouse, the wood-shed, the well, the fields. But are things growing there now?'

'Ay,' he answered. 'Just a bit of grain and a few potatoes.'

'Here I used to go, back and forth across the yard and did my work and didn't know about anything else—looked up at the mountain peaks, looked up at the sky, looked out over the water, took care of the animals and did what I was supposed to do, and so the day passed. Listen Haabjørg, do you hear the waterfall? How it murmurs and roars—'

'It's pretty here,' said Haabjørg.

The mother caught her in her arms and nervously exclaimed: 'Is that what you think? Ay, ay,—oh, isn't it pretty here!'

And all the way up to the cottage she kept mumbling to herself, her mind overflowing with her own little memories, and sometimes there were tears in her eyes and sometimes a smile on her lips. 'See, right here it was I got a sliver in my foot,—only twenty I was then and my body was limber—I could sit right down and draw out the sliver with my teeth—'

Not a word about her husband.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MIDNIGHT, and there stands Haabjørg outside the house: 'Mama!' she cries. A lost feeling comes over her on awakening under a strange roof, and out of the house she flies with nothing on save her little white night-gown which reaches down to her ankles, and there now she stands, beneath the open sky, her feet all wet with the dew. A pale bluish light, twilight almost, lies over the earth—midnight.

'Mama!'

'Ay!' answers Mama from the hay barn. 'Go back to bed, Baby, I'm coming in a moment!' And Lovisa Margreta hurriedly throws a garment or two about her and tucks the rest of her clothes under her arm.

Startled and embarrassed, Edevart hesitates at first to let himself be seen undressed, but learning boldness from her, he springs up, takes her in his arms, kisses her and strokes her breasts.

'Did I make you happy?' she asks.

It goes against his grain to talk of such a thing, to admit it, but he answers in confusion: 'Ay, thanks! And I?'

'Oh, *you!*' she answers in ecstasy and smiles a bit sheepishly.

'I'm so in love with you—'

'Mama!' cries the voice outside.

'Heavens above! She's still out there!' Lovisa Margreta whispers and hastens away.

Early next morning Edevart rows off after food and before noon returns with all kinds of good things to eat: salt, smoked and fresh food. Lovisa Margreta enraptured

again, unpacks the things and, even more enraptured, thanks him and calls out to Haabjørg: 'Will you just come and see everything that's here!'

Edevart, filled with pride, yet somewhat embarrassed: 'This is nothing compared with what you two are used to.'

'Oh, but this is home, and this is the grandest and best food I've ever seen in this room!' answers Lovisa Margreta, and bursts into tears. 'Kringles and gingerbread and goat cheese! Heavens above, I haven't seen goat cheese all the years I've been away, and that you may believe! I had a mite of goat cheese over at Karel's once before I went away, but I haven't tasted it since. We never had such things ourselves because we were so poor. The children and I never had anything and we went about here with hardly ever enough to eat. Just think of it! I had so many things come back to my mind this morning,' says Lovisa Margreta, beginning again to weep.

'H'm; Haabjørg, have you seen the waterfall?' asks Edevart to change the subject.

'No, we waited,' Lovisa Margreta replies, 'I thought maybe you'd want to be along. But now I'll cook dinner,' says she, wiping her eyes. 'We'll go out to the waterfall this afternoon.'

Edevart and the child go down to the beach. Something stirs within him and goes out to this child; if it weren't for the fact that Lovisa Margreta could see them from the house, he would sit down on a rock, take her in his arms and have a little chat with her. She is a pretty little girl, with a heavy braid of hair and blue eyes.

They hunt for shells and little silver mussels and this is a new game and splendid fun for Haabjørg; she claps her hands with glee and thinks her treasures are even prettier than Mama's rings.

'Does Mama have rings?'

'Oh, yes. Haven't you seen them? Two rings and one

has pearls. But these things here are even prettier!' She begs Edevart to help find lots of mussels and shells for her; she carries them off in her upturned dress and says that she is going to wash the sand from them and make them look pretty.

'And then what are you going to do with them?'

'You'll see!' and her little head nods as though to indicate that he's sure to see something fine.

A clever little creature she is, and Edevart finds it pleasant to be with her. He leads the way to a stretch of white sand where they cannot be seen from the house and here, with much care, Haabjørg draws a large square in the sand, later dividing this up into smaller squares of varying sizes—a childish picture, indeed.

'What's that going to be?' he asks.

'Can't you tell? A house.'

He sits down on a rock to take her in his arms, to hold her on his lap and talk with her, for something within him goes out to her, a kind of tenderness, a sweetness in his heart. Maybe, too, she will tell him who gave Mama her rings.

But Haabjørg has no time for such things; no, she is absorbed in the house she is building, so absorbed in fact that she empties the seashells from her dress and leaves them lying in the sand. 'Now wait right here while I go up and get my dolls,' says she. And with that she is gone.

A sweet little child she was. And heavens, how close she had come to him sometimes without showing the slightest fear, although he was a stranger! And here she is back, with a doll and a smaller boy doll and says: 'This is Mama and her little boy—now won't they have a good time!'

'What's Mama's name?'

'We called her Mrs. Puck in America. But here I don't know—'

'And what's the boy's name?'

'His name is Johnny.'

'But what are you going to do with them here?'

'Here? They're going to sit in their house and have a good time. That's why I built it. This is the parlour—won't you please come in, Mrs. Puck and Johnny, this is your new home, now sit down on the sofa! Wait Mrs. Puck, I forgot to make you a bedroom!' Haabjørg draws a bedroom and, with a look of profound thoughtfulness on her face, she marks off one more tiny little square and makes two holes in it.

'What's the meaning of that?' asks Edevart.

'Can't you see what it is? That's them's bathroom.'

'Ho, so that's them's bathroom, is it? But the kitchen, where's that?'

'Here, of course. You thought I forgot the kitchen too, didn't you? But I didn't. No, and now I'm going down to the water to wash all my shells. You come too!'

They walk down to the water's edge and scrape the sand out of the shells and mussels and wash them out. This is long and tedious work and he is unable to get her to stop and sit on his lap—she simply hasn't time.

After a while Lovisa Margreta calls out that dinner is ready and so they must leave their work. He gathers up the sea-shells and little silver mussels and carries them back away from the water.

'Why are you doing that?' she asks.

'So the tide won't get them.'

'The tide?'

'That's when the sea grows and comes up over the beach. Pick up your dolls now and come on home!'

'Does the sea grow? Is it alive?'

'No. It just grows once every day and once every night, that's all I know about it. It grows and comes up over the beach.'

'How far does it come?'

Haabjørg asks one question after another on their way up to the house.

They eat their dinner, wash the dishes and set out for the waterfall. They go in through the woods, along small paths and animal trails.

Haabjørg in the lead; sometimes she finds the right path and sometimes she finds the wrong, twisting there between the trees, wild as she is with curiosity. Occasionally her mother has to call out the direction to her.

'Which one of us does she take after, do you think?' asks Lovisa Margreta.

Edevart looks down at the ground with embarrassment; in Polden a pair of unmarried parents would not talk of such things, he was not used to it, and here he was expected to give an answer. 'Ay,' he says. 'Her mother, I guess.'

'H'm, maybe me most of all. But no, I don't know. Maybe you most of all. Both her eyes and her hair. She'll turn out to be pretty, you'll see.'

Edevart, attempting to change the subject: 'You'd better call her back now; she might get too near the falls.'

'Haabjørg!' calls her mother.

'Ay!'

'Wait for us! But it's still a good long distance to the falls, you know!'

'No, I don't know,' answers Edevart. 'I've never been there.'

Lovisa Margreta stops in her tracks. 'Never been there? Oh, no, this isn't your home after all, is it? As for me, though, I know every stone and bed of moss! Nothing here has changed, only things seem so much smaller to me now; why, even the stones seem to have shrunk.'

'That's because the ground grows up around them with the rotting of leaves and branches.' Edevart repeats what he has heard from folk who know about such things.

'That may be. Look there, now even that ant-hill is deserted. In my day it used to be a great big thing.'

Edevart explains again: 'That's only because the ants have found a better place to live and have moved there. Sometimes you run across a whole string of ants in the forest and that's when the ants are moving.'

'That may be,' says Lovisa Margreta and moves on. 'But then there isn't a single living creature here, any more,' says she. 'I used to meet sheep of ours all through here when I'd come along, and they'd know who I was and follow along behind me—sweet, gentle sheep they were, wool sheep. If only they were here now!'

Edevart: 'Sheep aren't hard things to get!'

'One thing after another,' she replies. 'So many things are different. And just to think, you've never been out to the falls! And you the owner of Doppen!' Lovisa Margreta appeared to be a bit hurt. He hadn't even inspected this place he got for the money he had given her; he had thought too little of it. She walks on silently for a time and then turns to him and says: 'If I had the means I'd buy back Doppen from you!'

Edevart, smiling: 'You may have the place for nothing!'

This did not smooth things out in the least, but at length harmony was restored. 'Do you think so little of Doppen that you'd be willing to give it way?' she asked.

'Ay, to you,' he answered. And after a careful silence, he was bold enough to ask: 'Don't you think we might own it together?'

She halts, looks down at the ground and answers: 'Ay.'

That settled things. He puts his arm around her, blushing and confused and kisses her right then and there. She casts a quick, anxious glance around after Haabjørg and whispers: 'Look out, she can see us!'

'It's a pity that we're not all alone right now!' he says.

She smiles at him and says: 'You're just as wild as ever, aren't you!'

They call Haabjørg to them and the three of them walk the remaining distance together. At the falls all three halt. Haabjørg says not a word but stands with open mouth; anything she might say would not be heard anyway, for the roar of the falls drowns every sound. Quietly she faces the miracle, tense and bending slightly forward—for safety's sake, Edevart catches her hand and clings to it.

The cataract comes leaping from above, as from an enormous spout, hurls itself out into space, bursts against some jagged rocks upon its way, and plunges on down into the depths of the frothing chasm. Spray rises from the bottom of the gorge where, amid boiling, heaving water, thunder seems eternally to roll back and forth upon itself without ever rising from its rock-bound prison.

Edevart looks down at the child; her hair is drenched and he tries to lead her away, but she struggles against him, points ahead of her and would rather advance than retreat. He has to use all his strength to hold her back.

Lovisa Margreta has gone into the woods and Edevart is left alone with his little girl. He cannot control himself, and strokes her hair to show her how wet it has become. She pays no attention to him. He rests his cheek against hers and when he finds that she doesn't mind this, he kisses her. She looks at him and seems to understand that he is begging her sweetly to listen to him and come away. She resists no longer.

A few steps back and they can hear each other's words. 'Wasn't it wonderful?' he asks. Once again he asks, but Haabjørg says nothing; she seems overcome by her great experience. He sees Lovisa Margreta sitting on a hummock, her hands in her lap, just sitting there. The child runs to her mother and now Edevart's heart is

pounding for fear that she will tell what he did. 'Hello!' he cries in order to buck himself up.

Lovisa Margreta nods to him, smiling: 'She was just telling me that you kissed her,' says she.

Edevart, ashamed and blushing: 'It was just that she wanted to go where it was dangerous and I—I simply didn't know how I could get her to—'

Lovisa Margreta: 'Ay, that was a good way to make her mind and that's just what I told her.'

On their way back, Haabjørg again runs on ahead and the two walk slowly behind, chatting of indifferent matters. She: 'Isn't that a lovely waterfall of yours?'

'Ay, ay; we have a grand falls.'

'I couldn't stand there looking at it any longer,' she says. 'So lonely and forlorn it seems.'

'How so?'

'Ay, there it is, just falling, falling, just there by itself. I knew I was going to cry, so then I came away.'

Edevart does not understand these vague little musings of her heart and is silent. Neither does he understand the gesture when Lovisa Margreta plucks a star flower and places it in his buttonhole; he isn't used to such things, one never did that in Polden. But with rich, spontaneous knowledge he understands her when she nestles in his arms; he feels the nearness of her face and each breath of life she draws—a hot flame shoots through his heart and he draws his arms about her as though she were the one thing in all the world that he cannot stand to lose. They strain to each other, wildly—then of a sudden she is restless, and looks around for Haabjørg.

The evening they spend together there in their little home; he chops a bit of firewood while she sets the table and prepares the meal. Young and pretty she is as she comes out to call him in to supper and stops a moment to chat with him, her sweetheart, ay, her husband—wonder-

ful moment for them both! Hand in hand they walk in to the house.

And after supper, Haabjørg is sleepy and worn out with play and excitement and so must go to bed. The grown-ups are free. . . . And so ended the first day.

The days that followed were the same,—abundant in love and in happiness. Edevart brought food from the trading station and paid cash for everything with the money his sisters sent him. A glorious life of idleness; he wanted nothing better. One day he got hold of August and rowed back with him to Doppen in order that his good friend might express his own opinion of Edevart's new home.

'Oh, yes,' said August. 'I've seen lots worse. I've seen huts made of bamboo, and round like a ring they were, with roofs that came down to the ground, yet folk lived in them just the same. But what do you want to do with Doppen? You can't feed more than two cows with what you can raise here, and you can't make the place any bigger.'

August greeted Lovisa Margreta and talked English with her; they got along famously together and neither would be outdone by the other; both knew a little of New York, although August, to be sure, knew only the streets along the water front. He was an object of admiration and curiosity to Haabjørg too, who had never before seen such teeth as his—she stood in front of him continually, simply waiting for him to open his mouth. Her mother became downright angry at this and said: 'She only wants you to take her to the waterfall; that's all she ever wants and Edevart and I are getting tired of it.'

'*Come along!*' August said in English.

'Don't let go her hand!' Lovisa Margreta called after them.

And of course August did not return from this trip to the waterfall without a new idea. 'You ought to build you a monstrous big mill with five millstones there,' he said to Edevart. 'You could grind enough flour there to keep ten parishes and get to be a rich man.'

'I have more than enough to do with the store home in Polden,' answered Edevart.

And he was entirely right as to that. His affairs in Polden had become involved of late; he had a letter from his youngest sister begging him to return. Paulina had been sending him hardly any money at all these past few months, and since most of the regular stock had been sold out, business was practically at a standstill. Why didn't he return with more goods? And concerning his sister Hosea, Ezra was now finished with that new place of his, had a cow and a harvest but no one to help him. Joakim was at home tilling the soil, but his father was up in Nordvaagen taking care of the telegraph line. The worst of it was that they were sold out of flour, coffee and tobacco and no one ever came to the store any more. And in addition to that, there was a rumour abroad to the effect that Gabrielsen was about to start up in business again—in his wife's name this time. Surely Edevart didn't intend that they should close the store, for it would be a terrible disgrace to go bankrupt and thus be no better off than Gabrielsen. . . .

So Edevart was rudely reminded that he was a trader in his own home village and that it was up to him to find some way out of his difficulties. He took August into his confidence and August began to ponder the matter at once. 'Now if only I had all those chests of mine that went to the bottom of the sea!' he said and began to hold forth in picturesque terms as to what he then would have done.

But Edevart pulled him back to earth: 'You'd surely

have had better use for your wealth than merely to help me out?'

'What are you talking about!' shouted August angrily. 'Wouldn't I give you at least half! Didn't you do enough for me?—Keep still will you,—half at least, I said!'

'I wonder if Romeo would let me have more things on credit on top of what I've had already,' said Edevart humbly.

'What have you had?'

'All sorts of things. Kitchen-ware and bed-linen, just things to put Doppen in order. Many things, three complete beds—'

'Are you going to stay here?' asked August.

'No, I don't know myself,' answered Edevart. 'It's only that she was over in America and wanted to come back and see Doppen.'

'Are you two going to get married?'

'Maybe it'll come to that.'

August: 'You can sell your waterfall to Romeo.'

'Waterfall?' asked Edevart, amazed.

'So that he could set up a monstrous big mill there. He'd be a fool if he didn't do that.'

'He won't do that.'

'Doesn't he need a mill? He buys two hundred bags of flour at a time which gets wormy before he has a chance to use it up. That flour comes from steam mills, fired by coal from abroad and that's why it's so expensive. Here by the waterfall he could run his mill free gratis and all he'd have to do would be to put up a building. He could build him a sawmill, too, if he wanted,—it's all the same—just so that he gets started at something. Ho, ho, what wouldn't they do in Canada if they had such a waterfall and didn't make the most of it?'

Edevart merely shook his head at this great scheme and hinted that even if such were the case, Romeo

wouldn't pay very much. 'I'd get little enough for it,' said he.

'You don't know anything about it!' said August. 'But anyway, since you live right here, you could be the miller and run the whole thing for him. That wouldn't be the worst thing for you to do!'

At these last words Edevart pricked up his ears. He was as bored to death with business as he was with everything else and he had no objection to trying a new way of earning his living. 'But I couldn't run a mill even if they were to give me the job,' he said. 'The only kind of mill I've ever seen is a coffee-mill, and that's God's truth!'

'I could teach you all that in a week,' said August, self-confident. 'And don't you worry about that!'

They talked the matter over and both became enthusiastic. That devil of an August, no matter what his problem might be, he could always find a way out! The only difficulties at this point were that the waterfall wasn't yet sold, the mill wasn't yet built and Edevart wasn't yet the foreman of the works. Not until his comrade had gone away did Edevart begin to realize all this, and it took the wind out of his sails again.

In the morning he rowed over to see Romeo and learn how his credit stood. Lovisa Margreta was in need of a few things from the store and prepared to go along; the three of them set out. Mother and daughter were dressed in their choicest finery.

Perhaps Lovisa Margreta was beginning to feel bored and lonely here, with the noise and bustle of New York still ringing in her ears. It was still a source of irritation to her that there wasn't a single animal on their farm. Edevart repeated that he could easily get some creatures, but Lovisa Margreta merely said, as before: 'Everything is so changed here now; ay, one thing after another.'

As Edevart sat there rowing, a vague thought began to trouble him: was it right that both his ladies should be wearing hats on their heads? Was this just as it should be? Ay, the child perhaps, but the mother? She no longer looked like herself; she had never had a hat casting shadows on her face in the old days! No, she was prettiest when she was bare-headed without all these clothes on, simply in skirt and blouse. And she had had such tiny bare feet!

August met him at the dock and said: 'I think the Old Chief would like to have words with you.'

'With me? What does he want?'

'Maybe he's wanting to buy the waterfall from you. I don't know.'

'Not he! If it was Romeo now—'

August: 'Ay, ay, I explained the whole thing to the Old Chief and spent a long time telling him about it. Say, he's a wonderful man to talk to! And so finally he slapped me on the back and says, says he: "August," says he, "I've been thinking all the time that some day I'd have to be building me a mill up there by that waterfall!" The very words he spoke. And now you'll be hearing them yourself.'

Edevart met both father and son in the office. They were cordial and Romeo gave him his hand and asked him how things were going with him. But neither of them mentioned the waterfall.

Instead, Romeo inquired: 'What's bringing you here this time?'

So then it was up to Edevart to speak. Could they help him out with a few more goods on credit; groceries, flour and the like? His store up home was now completely sold out.

Romeo picked up his pencil immediately and began to note down the order; it was 'yes' from the very beginning and he wrote down even more items than Ede-

vart had asked for, and said at once sincerely: 'It's a great pleasure for both my father and myself!' Not a trace of craftiness in this Romeo's nature. The sale price was lower than Edevart had imagined possible. Done. Edevart went out and sent a telegram home: 'Large shipment goods on way.'

He found his two ladies in the store; he was in a good mood because of his success with Romeo and greeted all the store folk.

'We are talking about America,' says Lovisa Margreta.

'Well, well, go right ahead!' answers Edevart agreeably.

She was talking English with Head-clerk Lorensen and seemed to have much on her mind. Lorensen had placed a stool outside the counter where she could sit and feel more at home. It turned out to be a long and lively chat and Edevart stood listening for a while with a pleasant but rather idiotic smile on his face. However, since he couldn't understand a word they said, he went out at length and returned to the boat to wait.

She didn't come—no, it was a long, long time before she came. Little Haabjørg had at least been sensible enough to take off her hat and was carrying it in her hand when they returned.

'We were talking about America,' says Lovisa Margreta, stepping into the boat. 'Lorensen wants to go back again, it doesn't agree with him here and I don't blame him, either.'

'Why?' asks Edevart coolly.

'Is it why, you're asking? He's simply got used to the country and the way folk live over there—it's all so different there than here! He just came home on a visit and to look around a bit.'

'Ho, and you? Are you back here simply on a visit?'

'Who, me?' answers Lovisa Margreta. She realizes

that she must be sweet and tender again and says: 'No, with me it's different. You waited so long for us to come, didn't you? Poor boy! But we had so much to talk about and all that—that's why we stayed too long. And here you sat waiting in the boat!'

'That was nothing!'

'I'll make it up to you some way, you'll see!' she says with a roguish look.

All well now, but as they come rowing in to the green cove and Lovisa Margreta sees Doppen there in front of her eyes, she cannot help exclaiming: 'No, *Herregud!* How small it all seems! I never realized how little it was!'

Edevart pales and asks bitterly: 'Is it too small for you again?'

She looks at him in alarm and begins to whimper: 'I didn't mean that, Edevart—I say such foolish things—it will always and always be big enough for me! I just meant from here, out here from the boat—I didn't mean—'

Oh, everything was all right when she was tender and sweet. But it was hard when she got more and more in the habit of going with him down to the trading station to talk about America. Occasionally she would meet Anders Vaade in the store and then the three of them would chat there together. Anders Vaade, the man in the linen duster whom she had met on the pier the day of her arrival, held the same opinion as Lorensen of the home to which they had returned—it didn't agree with him. He had become uprooted and dissatisfied, performed only the most essential tasks on his farm, such as hoeing potatoes, and chopping wood; the rest of his time he spent sauntering about in that linen duster of his.

Dark thoughts began to trouble Edevart's mind: what was there between Lovisa Margreta and those returned emigrants? What kind of hopes and longings were they putting into her head? Each time she returned

from a visit to the store, she was very much excited over what the men had been talking about; thoughtful and depressed she would be, and it was with difficulty that she remembered her small household duties. 'No, now I'm forgetting that we're hungry!' she would say.

After this had happened three times, Edevart thought the only thing for him to do would be to have a talk with her. 'That Anders Vaade, who is he?' he asked. 'Is he some one you used to know over in America?'

'Ay, both here and over there,' she replied. 'He was born here in the same parish as I was and we crossed the ocean together. He's a friend of Lorensen's; all three of us kept in touch all the time we were over there and used to see each other often both at *picnics* and at home. I even suspect that both of them were a bit in love with me, ha, ha, ha!'

Was her tone just a bit too light? Was this her sweet, guileless manner of former days? Edevart felt shame for her and was depressed. But when she looked at him as though she thought he couldn't take a joke, he was obliged to smile and asked: 'So they were in love with you were they? What did your husband say to that?'

She, evasively: 'My husband—?' She turns to Haabjørg: 'You must go out and get an armful of wood for Mama!' And when the child has left the room, she continues: 'My husband—ay, he went away from us, you see, got into some kind of trouble. We don't know what happened to him, but anyway he disappeared.'

Her tone was even lighter now; no sympathy, no pity lay in her voice as there had in bygone days when she had stood up for her husband through thick and thin.

'I heard that you're divorced from him,' said Edevart.

'Oh, yes, I'm divorced from him all right. There was no sense in keeping on with him any longer. And there was nobody who thought I didn't do the right thing, either. Do you think it was wrong?'

'No, I—!'

'Oh, you don't seem to know what's in your mind.'

'Good Lord, what are you talking about? For if you hadn't got yourself divorced from him, how would it be for us right now? It's you and me who are to live here together at Doppen, isn't that right?'

Little Haabjørg returned with the wood and was told to go in to the other room and set the table.

Lovisa Margreta thought for a long while and then she said: 'At Doppen, did you say? But we can't very well stay here all the time, not like this, I mean. Folk will begin to talk about it!'

'Ay, what do you want to do then?' asked Edevart.

'What do you want to do yourself?' she answered.

'I want for us to get married. That's all there is to that.'

'Ay,' said she softly. 'But this is the way it is: Here I am and my children are in America. You wouldn't want to go over there?'

'Who, me!' he almost screamed. 'That would be the last thing I'd think of, you can be sure of that, but—'

'Ay, there, you see?' said she.

'What do I see? I don't understand—'

'I merely mentioned it.'

'Do you want to go back there again?'

'I don't know,' she answered. 'Some time, maybe, but I would just as soon live in some city here in Norway, too, or wherever you say.'

'Ho, in a city!' Edevart decided to express the thought he had long had in mind. 'Suppose you came with me up north to my home, what would you think about that?'

'No, oh, no. Home with you?'

'Up there you wouldn't want for anything!'

'No, but—what would I do there! What kind of a place is your home?'

'It's the place where I make my living. I have a store there.'

'Ay, but I mean where would we live? Have you a house?'

With that Edevart became almost afraid of his own idea: to return home to Polden with her and the child would be downright impossible. Conditions there were even more difficult than here, and most important of all, he had no home of his own. He was obliged to tell her quite frankly how things stood: a little store, something in the nature of an office, something in the nature of a bedroom under his father's roof—oh, no, they would be wretchedly cramped, worse than here at Doppen, but. . . .

'Then it's not to be thought of,' said she, shaking her head.

'I can build,' said Edevart.

'Build? Ay, ay. Oh, yes, but that would take time!'

No, the whole thing was impossible. Nothing pleased her any more; not even Doppen was good enough for her now. Where, then? Some other place, perhaps even many other places. Lovisa Margreta's roots had been torn up from the soil where she had grown and now she belonged everywhere—nowhere. Filled with uncertainty, Edevart said: 'Oh, well, then I don't know anything about anything!'

Lovisa Margreta's attitude changed; she was sorry and distressed. At once she became his kind and tender sweetheart who petted and caressed him. 'Don't take it so hard,' she said. 'We'll find a way out!'

What kind of a way out would it be? A few weeks ago they had agreed to be married and live together here at Doppen, but that no longer appeared to be anything like a certainty. The passing of the days had changed everything. Lovisa Margreta had become fidgety and restless and now she hinted at living in the city—what in the world was there in a city to attract Lovisa Mar-

greta Doppen? She even began to speak of her children in America whom she had previously mentioned most casually and who were now grown-up anyway. She had received a couple of letters from them—they wrote in English that they were getting along splendidly—both had received a raise in their wages and were very proud of themselves. These American youngsters needed their mother as little now as they had when she had left them; and, as for her, didn't she have a child with her?

No, what kind of a way out would it be? The seams that held them together had almost reached their bursting point.

But, remarkable though it was, Edevart managed to hold himself together—he stood on his own two legs and endured his painful uncertainty. He had himself been uprooted by his wanderings, had become scattered in his spirit, and had lost his grip on life. Nothing any longer seemed important to him. He could not foresee what Lovisa Margreta would do in the end, but after all, the worst she could do would be to leave the country. Yes, taken all in all, that would be the worst.

He left the house. Shortly afterward little Haabjørg came to him and announced that dinner was ready, but he said: 'No, thank you!' Had he expected that Lovisa Margreta herself would come to tell him, and that they would then go hand in hand into the house? She had not come. No, things were very different now from before.

He felt completely humiliated. Was he a lump of putty to be moulded into any odd shape? No, he refused to consider himself as such. It was only that his sensibilities had become dulled. He was as far from being a fool now as ever before. Walking along a sheep trail through the woods, his backbone stiffened and his thoughts became clearer; he could not expect to support himself on such a small place as Doppen and he could

not settle down here to live and meanwhile get his daily bread from Polden. His life was becoming more complicated all the time.

And were things one bit better with Lovisa Margreta? He was a master when it came to figuring things out in his head and he could add two and two together; mentally he traced her conduct from the day of her arrival until the present, recalled how overflowing with sweetness toward him she had been that first day in the boat and later in the evening, that first overpowering evening. Ay, lovely she had been in every way, but it had all been part of a scheme. The glory hadn't lasted, so what else could it have been? It had been a scheme she had cunningly contrived in advance! It had merely been an attempt on her part to resurrect the old Lovisa Margreta he had loved for so many years. There she had sat in the boat, knowing she was no longer the same person, but none the less she had tried to please him. She had done her best to be as she had been before, and heavens above! as she used to say—ought she not to have done just that? For there he sat at the oars and had waited for her and believed in her! God help her, it would not have been right to disappoint him, so— 'Just wait till we're on shore!' But poor Lovisa Margreta, the task was too hard.

He turned abruptly, went directly to the house and began a fresh discussion with her. And there she sat, still in her finery. 'What are we going to do?' he asked, throwing himself down on a bench. 'What do *you* want to do?'

'Oh, why do you take it so hard?' she said. 'Now listen to me: you don't like it because I go over with you to the store, so now I'm not going to do it any more.'

'No?'

'No, for it doesn't make any difference to me. What do

I want there? If the Old Chief comes walking by me, he doesn't even notice me and it's the same with Madam Knoff and her daughter—they don't so much as nod. It's exactly as though they were gods instead of people. The only *gentleman* in the whole place is Lorensen and if he had anything to say about it, they would invite me to come in. But no—'

'I suppose they would,' Edevart muttered.

'Of course that's what they would do, ask us in and talk with us and make us feel at home. I'm sure it's just because they can't speak English, only they won't admit it. I don't care a fig about that, but I have prettier clothes than Juliet and I've seen more of the world than all the Knoffs put together, for I've lived in many places in America. Little Haabjørg wears clothes such as Juliet and her mother never knew anything about when they were her age. Just look at me now—on top and underneath—'

With two fingers she daintily lifted the hem of her dress and showed him the edge of a white lace petticoat.

'Do you remember when you used to go trotting around barefoot in a little short skirt and a mere blouse with nothing around your neck?'

She looked at him in amazement; to think that he felt called upon to humble her by reminding her of her days of want! 'No, I didn't have so very many clothes in those days,' said she, wounded.

'No, but do you remember how pretty you were? That's all I meant. Right then and there I felt it, and oh, how wonderful it was—love for you, I mean. Right through your clothes I could see your body when it moved; it was so pretty, I fell in love and I went down to the boat and I didn't know what I was doing when we towed the sloop out.'

'You didn't want me to go about like that all my life, did you?' she asked.

Edevart was silent.

No, his words had not made the slightest impression upon her; they belonged to a realm of thought which had become quite foreign to her and which she had long since thrust out of her mind. She said: 'But this much is sure, I won't go with you to the store any more.'

'No, no. But what are we going to do with ourselves then?' he cried in desperation. 'Do you want to go away from me again?'

She was not pretending now, she herself was frankly uncertain and unhappy and began to cry. 'How do I know?' said she. 'No, not away from you! But we simply can't stay on here!'

Edevart: 'I'll go home at once and start to build. Then will you come to me?'

'Ay,' she answered. 'Maybe that will be the best thing, I don't know.'

No decision, not one firm or definite word. No, she simply began again to talk of how kind Edevart had been to her and how much she must have cost him. Ought she not then to do something for him in return? She became hysterical and threw herself into his arms, laughing and crying, kissed him shamelessly with mouth and tongue and, whispering in his ear, promised to be good to him when evening came.

Oh, Lovisa Margreta had never been so shameless before!

Not for a moment did she let the conversation become serious, but ran on in a light vein; her mood changed and little by little she became cheerful again as she bustled about the room. She made fun of the loom which still stood in one corner and said: 'Ay, old comrade of mine, here you are still standing. We couldn't take you with us when we went away and we couldn't sell you either, so here you are still. Isn't it funny?' she asked Edevart.

He failed to understand. 'Funny? How do you mean? Didn't you ever weave over in America?'

'Oh, dear, no!' she replied. 'Where I came from they never use hand looms!'

'You used to weave such pretty things!'

'Ay, ay; yes, that was good enough for us here at Doppen, but—No, I couldn't stand any more to sit here shuttling thread by thread! Anyway, I've forgotten how.' And in fun she sat down in the loom and worked the batten a couple of times playfully and smiled as though to forgive such a wretched little loom.

How Lovisa Margreta had changed! He remembered the time she had taken him into the storehouse to show him all her treasures; they had been important to her then and she had been proud of them—ay, rugs there had been, a few sheepskins, a home-spun Sunday dress, a little butter in a wooden tub—oh, things not to be ignored, and Edevart had expressed his amazement and said: 'What grand things you have!' At noon she had given him porridge and milk, and good food that had been. He remembered that day clearly.

Was it possible that she was making fun of the loom which for so many years had kept life in her and her two children? How arrogant and stupid it seemed of her, and Edevart felt anger welling up within him. He had taken note of the manner in which she had just stepped into the loom; legs close together in order to appear elegant—h'm, and it was she who just a little while ago promised him quite shamelessly a passionate night! Affectation and tricks she had learned; when she had showed him her petticoat, she had lifted her skirt as though with a pair of tweezers. And how had she used to step into the loom? One leg at a time, straddling naturally, her thin skirt straining up against her spread thighs, her body bending forward as she did so—ay, sound and graceful youth there astride the seat. . . .

Edevart went to talk it over with August, told him that something had come up that disturbed and distressed him. But August was extremely busy—he wouldn't be leaving Knoff's place for some time now, for he was shaping a project in his mind and was in need of capital. 'And can you guess what it is I'm working on now?' he asked.

Edevart, thinking only of himself, replied: 'It looks as though I'll have to be going home to Polden and do a little building.'

'I don't suppose you'd even understand this new scheme of mine,' continued August. 'Look here!' he said, taking a brown piece of stone from his pocket.

Edevart was in no mood for jokes at the moment so, pretending not to see the stone, he repeated that he was returning to Polden to begin building.

'Build? Can you afford it?' asked August at length. 'All right, then you can loan me a bit of money—I'm stone-broke myself!' Oh, that August, a devil of a strange fellow! clever; wild and unruly, but clever.

No, Edevart had no money to be lending, not even enough to build with. However, no matter how it turned out, he would have to make the attempt.

'Just heft this stone?' said August. 'Take it in your hand!'

Edevart took the stone, but dropped it immediately. And when August burst into laughter, Edevart muttered, embarrassed: 'The filthy thing was so damned heavy!'

'Metal!' explained August.

'Well, what of it?'

'What of it? It can be gold or silver just as well as anything else. Now, for example, just hold this one in your hand!' And August handed him another brown stone.

Edevart: 'This is heavy, too. Same thing.'

'Ay. And you needn't think that this isn't metal, whatever kind it is.'

'What are you going to do with it?' asked Edevart.

'You'll see when the time comes. I've sent a box of it down to Trondhjem and down there they're testing it out night and day and will let me know what they find out. I'm not working here at Knoff's warehouse with nothing in my head. One Sunday I stood here looking up at the mountains and so I went up there to hunt for metal. Ay, well, and it didn't take such a long time, not so many knocks with the pickaxe either. Metal, did I say? Why, the whole mountain is metal, and heavy just like this. I know what I'm talking about.'

'Ho, and in that case I suppose it belongs to Romeo?'

'You think so, do you? I wish you'd talk sense for once! The mountains are open to all prospectors, but I had to go to the sheriff and stake my claim. Later the thing will probably go as far as the King.'

'Ay, if only it was gold!' said Edevart indifferently. He was not interested in stones and began again to talk of his journey home.

August: 'You simply can't go until I hear what kind of stones these are. For if it's valuable metal, I'll be loaning you money to build with. What do you want to build for? Isn't that store of yours big enough?'

Edevart: 'It's just that I can't have her and the youngster up home with me until I have a house for them to live in.'

'Of course it may be that there's only graphite and other trash in these stones,' said August reflectively. 'And then I'd have all my trouble for nothing. It was expensive, too, to send them, for the box was good and heavy. If it hadn't been that I got one of the crew of the mail steamer to take them for me free, I'd have the stones on my hands still.'

Edevart was unable to understand. 'Then how could they be expensive to send?' he asked.

'How? Didn't I have to give him that watch of mine?'

'Your watch!' cried Edevart.

'Do you think I care a hang about that?' answered August. 'If there's gold in those stones, then I'd have a whole mountain of gold and could give away watches to everyone in the whole land and kingdom of Norway. That's all I can say about that.'

Chatter about stones, brown stones, heavy stones. Edevart realized that his comrade was himself in financial difficulties just at present and would be unable to help him. He nodded and went his way. After he had taken a few steps, he remembered something and turned around. He walked up close to August and said: 'What do you mean? I thought you lost that watch of yours?'

'Lost it?'

'Out fishing. You said that Magnus in the store had taken it.'

'Oh—no, I found it again. I had hidden it so he couldn't go after it.'

'So you didn't have it with you when you went fishing?'

'No. What was I going to say? Now, you won't go squealing all over the place what I told you, will you?'

'About Magnus?'

'No, to hell with Magnus! I mean about what I found up the mountain. Don't even mention it to anybody! Let them get wind of it and they'll right away come running to me after money—they'll be wanting to borrow from five dollars up. Women folk are the worst—they'll never take No for an answer. Here, now, I went and loaned that gold ring of mine to one of them, but do you think I'll ever see it again? Good-bye to that! But just feel of these!' said August once more, proffering Edevart the stones. 'It feels just as though there's a bit of grease on them!'

'Ay, but what of it?'

'That means they're the right kind; ay, the greasier they feel, the more metal there is in them. I've been many places in the world and I know what I'm talking about.'

'Ay, that you have.'

'I got me a magnet, but these stones don't grab hold of the magnet, so it can't be mere rubbish like iron.'

'What do you think it can be then?'

'I don't know. But gold don't take hold of a magnet, either. You can try it out with that ring of yours.'

Well, well, more chatter about stones. But Edevart no longer ignored his comrade's ideas. 'So you really think that you've found something up the mountain?' he asked.

'That I've found something!' cried August. 'God bless you, man, am I blind or out of my head? Can't you see for yourself? And let me tell you, Edevart, you mustn't think of going home until I've had news from Trondhjem. I don't want you to go away from here empty-handed, remember that! Build, did you say? I'll make it so you can put up a big place at once without fooling around with trifles!'

Edevart rowed back to Doppen and resumed his life of idleness. His meeting with August had made him feel easier in his mind, and his comrade's faith in the remarkable stones he had found made Edevart uncertain as to his plans. 'God knows,' he thought, 'maybe he has found gold at that'—for there was more to August than showed on the surface! But above all, Edevart was now able to postpone his journey; it was pleasant to know that he didn't have to set out on the following morning. It had been so difficult and distressing for him to come to a decision. He told Lovisa Margreta that his journey would have to be put off, he was waiting for something to develop.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LOVISA MARGRETA had promised herself and Edevart to stay away from the store, but she was unable to keep her promise. She had been sincere enough when she made it, and her resolution had pleased Edevart at the time, but later he became less exacting and even himself encouraged her to go with him. 'It's pretty on the water to-day,' he would say. 'You ought to bring the child and come along.' What difference did it make to him if she had her little chats in English and took her pleasure where she could find it? Of course she would be thoughtful and taciturn when she got back home, but this no longer pained him as it had before. And as for Lovisa Margreta herself, things turned out better than she had expected; ever after the day Romeo greeted her as he was passing through the store and stopped to joke with Haabjørg she had regarded the Knoff family in a far more kindly light. Romeo was not so bad; he gave the child sweetmeats and asked her if she would like to stay there with him. Haabjørg said that she would; it was such fun to be in the store, and besides, there were pigeons and hens and cows and other animals about the place. Her mother smiled her pleasure at their conversation; Haabjørg was bright and gave amusing answers to everything, and Romeo laughed like a boy. As they were leaving, he said to her: 'Now you won't forget to come back?'

'No,' and she thanked him.

'You're not fooling me, are you?'

'No, you'll see I'm not!' answered Haabjørg.

In truth, this trip had not been wasted as far as Lovisa

Margreta was concerned. She told Edevart that Romeo was really nicer than she had supposed.

And not so many days went by either before Haabjørg was anxious again to be off and Edevart willingly gave his permission. He himself had not got along with the child as well as he had hoped; he had not dared to kiss her after that first time and he avoided being alone with her; and neither did she of her own accord ever come and sit on his lap or hang about his neck. But in small secret ways she was always in his heart and no matter what she wanted, it did not lie in his power to refuse her, and so on her next trip to the store, they both went together with her mother.

On this day, however, it was some time before Romeo put in his appearance; they made their small purchases, Edevart selecting his provisions while Lovisa Margreta talked with Lorensen. The child had disappeared. Suddenly through the office door came Haabjørg hand in hand with Romeo who laughed aloud and said: 'She came to get me!' And as she continued to cling tightly to his hand, he went on to say that she had asked him to take her to see the calves.

Her mother clapped her hands and cried: 'Oh, that child!'

'Splendid!' said Romeo, for he was no more than a boy himself. 'Come on then, Haabjørg!' And together they went out to see the calves.

They remained away for some time and when they returned, they had seen many animals; they walked the entire length of the store chatting and absorbed in each other. 'Do you want to go up and see Juliet?' he asked. And ay, that she did and clutched his hand again.

'Oh, that child!' said her mother again. 'We really must be going home!'

'Can't she stay over?' asked Romeo.

'Of course, I can!' answered Haabjørg herself and made everyone in the store roar with laughter.

They talked it over. She had no night-gown with her, said her mother, in order to call attention to their elegant mode of living. Night-gown? Romeo imagined that Juliet still had such a thing left over from her childhood days; he didn't even know that there were such things as night-gowns in the world, ha, ha, ha! But Juliet still had some dolls, in any event, he said. When Haabjørg heard that, she clung to him more tightly than ever and wanted to be taken at once.

'Let her stay!' whispered Edevart coaxingly. 'I'll row back after her to-morrow.'

On the way back to Doppen, Lovisa Margreta sat in the boat and looked through some American magazines. They were both glad to have left the child behind at the Knoff's, for this might be considered a step up in the world for her mother as well. 'Not that it makes any difference to me,' she said. 'But they can at least show some politeness.'

'What are you reading?' asked Edevart.

'Something Lorensen gave me from Anders Vaade,' she answered. She became animated at once and explained: 'It's about Florida, in America. I've never been there, but it must be the grandest place in the world. It's a pity you can't read it, for it tells every possible thing about the country and lakes and railroads and what they grow on the farms there. Just look at all these coloured pictures here, with red apples and green bunches of grapes and yellow wheat and blue plums—oh, they grow all sorts of things there and there never will be poverty and misery in that country like there is here! Just look at this picture: It looks like Anders Vaade himself sitting there on that big machine with two horses to pull it. Look how evenly the wheat lies on the ground after it's cut. Later

he'll come back and bind it into sheaves and, God knows, he has a machine for that as well.'

'Ay, grand it is!' said Edevart.

'Wouldn't you really like to go to such a country yourself?'

'Ay, like to maybe—but I've never really thought much about it.'

'But you ought to.'

'Ay, but—!' cried Edevart, annoyed. 'But wasn't it agreed that we should stay at Doppen?'

'Oh, I thought we said that you were going to build so we could come home to live with you?'

Edevart was silent.

'It won't work, you'll see. Just let me tell you everything that's in these books and then see if you won't have a desire to go to such a country,' she continued. 'Anders Vaade is going back again. Lorensen, too, for that matter, but this time he's going to try his luck in Canada. They're going this autumn and a good many others from here are going along with them, too. What would you say to our going along?'

Edevart shook his head.

'Promise me anyway that you'll think about it.'

'I have a little business that earns me my daily bread right here in this country,' he continued.

She: 'What will that ever amount to! Here we have to creep and claw our way along from day to day and get nowhere in the end. Take Karel, that neighbour of ours, how well off is he?'

'Karel? He's getting along fine, he has all the things he needs, those boys of his are big and bright, and he gets good crops from his fields. I can't see why you mention Karel. He's satisfied, isn't he?'

'That's only because he doesn't know about anything else, can't you understand that! Has Karel such a

machine drawn by two horses as this one here in the book? No, he doesn't know anything about that! It's just as Lorensen says, that it's good enough here at home only for those that don't know anything better.'

Edevart looked sharply at her and said: 'There was a time that you found it good enough for you here at home.'

She smiled simply because the answer was so easy. 'Ay, but that was because I didn't know about anything else.'

'Don't let's talk any more about it,' he muttered. 'You've changed so.'

Oh, but this was the very impression she had sought to avoid since the day of her arrival—had she spoiled everything now? On their arrival home she was doubly sweet to him, changed at once into her everyday clothes, cooked dinner, drew him to her now and then and whispered tender words. He had decided to keep away from her that evening, naturally he couldn't even think of going to her —but oh, he did just the same. Ay, for she had decided that this night he was by no means to sleep in the hay barn since the two of them would be alone, and she had even let fall a hint that there would be room for him in the house —and for safety's sake, she had covered the windows with cloth. Who could refuse?

They both gained much by being together: love, promises and lies. She was his greatest joy, and lovely she was beyond measure; there was no one like her, a lucky star had shown him the way to her, he had come in for a great stroke of fortune—so, more or less, he felt or imagined he felt.

'Don't go away from me!' he begged. 'I'm so in love with you, more than ever before!' And deep within him he had no objections to having her believe what he said. For in such a case, she would appear as the executioner and he the victim, the martyr.

'It's the same with me,' she replied, matching lie with lie. 'I could never be in love with any one else!'

And both were demoralized and out of tune with themselves; nothing was as it had been. They were now able to lie close together and—talk. The night was warm and they threw back the covers; it was light, they saw each other, so of course, none of their kisses went astray. And still she was able to talk.

'Am I like you want me to be to you?'

'Ay.'

'Like you want to have me?'

'Ay.'

The moment came when they could not help forgetting themselves and keeping silent. But their moment of ecstasy had barely passed when Lovisa Margreta again spoke up, right then and there, her head close to his on the pillow: 'Go away from you, did you say? No, that I never shall. I'll never go away unless you are with me. Nobody will be able to make me. And besides, Haabjørg—I can't take her away from you, can I?'

'No.'

'But couldn't you come with us, you, too, so that all three of us could go?'

'I don't know,' he said. He was ashamed to deny her anything now that she had been so good to him. She had not employed the subterfuge he had encountered in others, had not from the very beginning exploited his increasing excitement in order to advance her own ends—could he thus pay her back with ingratitude? 'Are you really so anxious to go?' he asked.

'Ay, if only to get away from here!' she replied. 'Ay, maybe over to America would be best. I'm becoming more and more uneasy here. I don't understand what's the matter. And now since I got these American books——'

'I'll think it over,' he said.

'Oh, Edevart, I'd be so grateful to you!' she cried and threw herself upon him, wild with joy. She kindled enthusiasm within him as well, as she talked about it far into

the night, every little while repeating how kind he had been to her all this time and how grateful she would be to him—ay, heavens above, that she would! She convinced him; lay upon his broad breast and roused him to further passion and further promises. By morning he had promised her everything she asked.

He is in the boat rowing after Haabjørg. In truth he is out of sorts with himself; his promises of the night before had been inexcusable. He to America! Was his business up in Polden to go to the dogs? And his aged father alive to witness it! He who had been so overcome by each little addition to the home and had said: 'If only your mother were alive to see!'

On the pier Edevart meets August. No good news from him; the answer from Trondhjem had come and had reported that samples from August's mountain had been tested several times before, that the mountain had even been drilled and that the place had been known for a generation. 'I came too late,' said August.

'Well, I'll be hanged!' cried Edevart, appalled.

August stands for a time as though crushed by his cruel fate, then with an almost superhuman effort of will he braces himself up and remembers that Edevart is there. 'Now I won't be able to help you,' he said.

Edevart's sympathy went out to August. 'That you should be so unlucky!'

'Ay,' answered August. 'That watch of mine into the bargain. But then I don't care such a lot about that. Happy journey to it!'

'How so?'

'The whole mountain was no more than a dung-heap.'

'What's that you're saying!'

'Of course, I was neither blind nor out of my head—I did find *something*, they can't fool me as to that; but when

they tested it they found only sulphur and silicon and such rubbish as that, and what good would that do me? And, anyway, it's so thin and scattered that it isn't worth bothering about. Did you ever hear the like! It looked as though the whole mountain was made of the same stuff, and here it turns out that it just comes here and there in streaks, and besides, there's five or six other kinds of junk stuff mixed in with it.'

Edevart stood speechless with disappointment.

'No, damn it, it wasn't gold!' concluded August. 'What are you going to do now?'

'Who, me? I'm going up to the trading station after the little American girl. She's been here overnight.'

'I meant what are you going to do about building?'

'I won't be able to build. I see nothing else for me to do but to leave the country.'

'If only I'd have been able to do the same!' cried August yearningly, 'I'd have done it long ago! But now I'll have to be staying on here at the warehouse until I can earn me some money.'

'Are you absolutely dead broke?'

'Dead broke. But I have my revolver.'

'I'll loan you a couple of dollars,' said Edevart. 'I just got some money from home.'

'Don't talk nonsense, man! You're not made of money, are you?'

'And later we'll see,' Edevart continued. 'After I've scraped together what I have here and what I have back home in Polden, maybe I'll be able to help you. Would you like to come along?'

'Name the day and hour!' answered August.

Edevart rows home with Haabjørg. She has little bags of sweetmeats and other things to eat. Juliet has given her a doll all dressed in silk and later she is to have one that is larger, but she must come and get it herself. Romeo

has given her a finger ring with a red pearl like the ones he has for sale in the store.

'Did you have a good time?' asks Edevart.

'Ay. And soon I must go back after the other doll.'

'What do you want with so many dolls?'

'Won't that be mother and daughter, then?'

'What did you do all the time, play?'

She is a bit reticent about answering these questions; now as always, she is somewhat distant with him, regards him as though he were somewhat impertinent. Suddenly she smiles—and says to herself: 'I have to laugh when I think of those two kittens!'

Little Haabjørg is bubbling over with her recent experiences; arriving home, she exhibits all her gifts and unasked, begins to tell her mother all about her visit; Juliet had played—klunk, klunk, klunk!—and that was wonderful. They had gone into the kitchen and there they found some one eating. 'The man with the bright teeth, you know the one. I sang for them and he talked English, but there were two kittens running all over the floor and a big mother cat who went after them or sat watching them play about. I'm to have one of them and bring it home, for they were so funny.'

'Was it grand in the parlour?'

'Mm-h'm. But in the bakery they were all white with flour and they had flour on their noses and dough on their hands—you should have seen them! Then we went to see the hens and gave them something to eat, and then we went all around.'

'Who took you around?'

'Everybody. Ay, but not Madam, for she was so fat she had to stay in the house. But Romeo and Juliet and the Chief took me and the Chief, he showed me that gold watch of his and let me listen to it, and then he went out. And Jomfru showed me the pantry, too, and there were all kinds of things on the shelves and in the drawers and she

gave me some cake. It was lots of fun with them there, you can be sure of that.'

'Did they ask you to come again?'

'Ay, you know they did, for I must go back and get that doll.'

'Did Juliet have a night-gown for you?'

'Mm-h'm. But it was so short, it was a jacket.'

'Ho, just a jacket!' said Lovisa Margreta. 'Ay, I thought as much! That's all they ever wear here! Did they ask after Mama?'

'Ay. No, I don't think they did. They asked after Papa. I saw the calves again, and they didn't want to bite me, but just lick my hand.'

'Didn't they ask after Mama?'

'No. But I told them that you had two rings, one with pearls.'

No, they hadn't asked after Mama.

And there was further disappointment for Lovisa Margreta the next time she took the child to the Knoffs'; for they had no interest in Mama herself—it was little Haabjørg they met with open arms and made a fuss over; her mother was not even invited into the house. Happily for her then, Anders Vaade was in the store with his grey linen duster about him and he and Head-clerk Lorensen entertained her without interruption. They set a date for their departure from the country and discussed the details of the journey. Edevart stood listening to them but, since the discussion was carried on entirely in English, he understood not a word that fell from their lips.

A maid brought a message from 'them inside' asking whether Haabjørg might stay overnight with them once again. No invitation for the mother. She looked at Edevart and said: 'I can't understand what they want with the young one all the time.'

Head-clerk Lorensen stood with a crafty expression on

his face and answered her in a soft voice: 'It's just because Romeo has taken a fancy to her, and they want to cater to him.'

'Then why can't she stay?' whispered Edevart.

'Oh, I don't know,' said her mother. 'But anyway I brought a night-gown for her this time.' She handed the maid a bundle done up in paper and sent her back with it.

But the maid had no more than left the store when Lovisa Margreta clutched Edevart's arm and whispered: 'Get back that bundle, it wasn't the one!'

Edevart, slow to comprehend: 'Wasn't the one?'

'No. It was my own night-gown. Look here, here is hers! Hurry up and get back that other bundle!'

Her own night-gown? Edevart was puzzled as he hurried off. He knew his way about the place very well and he ran as fast as he could, but he was unable to catch the girl until she had reached the kitchen.

It took no time to exchange the bundles, but there in the kitchen stood Jomfru Ellingsen, the housekeeper who had married Store-lad Magnus. She recognized him at once and coloured, but nevertheless she looked straight at him and allowed her gaze to rest on him without flinching, and she smiled when he came forward to greet her. Jomfru Ellingsen had not changed although she was married now and went about with a large gold ring on her middle finger; she looked exactly as she had in the past—her sleeves were rolled up and her arms were round and young—it seemed that nothing had been able to affect her.

'You're a man we don't see often!' she said.

'Why should I show myself around here? You're married, aren't you?' he replied, derisively.

'And you, aren't you married too?'

'No, I haven't done anything as crazy as that.'

'Anyway, I hear it said that you've found that wife of Haakon Doppen's again.'

'H'm! Ay, there's some truth in that. She came back and

wanted to see that old home of hers, and that was something I couldn't deny her,' he answered cravenly.

'Ay, ay, it's nothing to me.'

'How are you getting along?' he asked.

'As always, from day to day. And you?'

'No, there's no use talking about me. It will probably come to the point where I'll have to leave the country.'

'Oh, ho, so you've got yourself into trouble, have you?' she said jokingly.

'Ay, trouble of my own,' he answered.

The self-pitying sigh that he uttered fell flat. If he had desired to give her the impression that he had been mistreated and was to be sympathized with, that Fate had almost ruined him, and that he was to be considered a martyr, he was annoyed to observe that Jomfru Ellingsen had done no more than smile in his face, and that with a trace of a sneer.

'Are you laughing at me?'

'Should I cry instead, do you think?' she answered. 'You made your own bed, now lie in it and don't go blaming others for the way things stand with you.'

Now of course he had done nothing of the kind and he answered, offended: 'I can't make out what you mean! Have I been blaming you?'

'Not me! But let's forget about it, I didn't mean anything by what I said.'

She was stiff with him, a bit too high and mighty. Edevart was on the point of leaving but she would not let him go. There in the kitchen maids were passing to and fro at their work, looking to the stove, setting the long table for the work people, washing and scouring; Jomfru Ellingsen quickly opened the door to the pantry and said: 'Come on in here, I've something I want to tell you!'

'What is it?' asked Edevart, following her.

They stood face to face behind the closed door. Nothing happened.

'What is it?' said she at length. 'Nothing.'

Edevart stared: 'What——?'

Her high and mighty manner left her; she smiled as though she were confused and ashamed; looking down, she said: 'I just wanted to talk with you a bit——'

He: 'I haven't time for that just now. Look here, they sent me in after this bundle and now I'll have to be going back with it. They're waiting for me.'

'Who's waiting?'

'My people.'

An expression of bitterness crossed her face and she muttered: 'Then don't let me keep you. I just thought you would like to sit down for a while and talk with me and have a cup of coffee and some cake.'

'Many thanks, but——'

He really felt rather sorry for her and he was no longer stiff in his manner toward her; attempting to be friendly, he took her hand and said: 'This is a heavy ring you have here!'

'Ay.'

'But why do you wear your wedding-ring on your middle finger?'

'Because it was too big for me.'

'Ay, ay! That Magnus, he wanted to do well by you and saw to it that you got one big enough!'

She did not reply to this. Instead she drew her hand away and busied herself here and there about the pantry. For instance, she had to go over and pull out a certain drawer. And what was in the drawer? Flour, so far as Edevart could see. And what was she trying to do, then? Oh, she was simply covering up her embarrassment, no doubt.

'And here you let me stand!' he exclaimed impatiently and walked out.

She followed him into the kitchen. Her face was white and she looked as though she wanted to kill him. As he

passed through the door, he felt her hand on his back, pushing.

Lovisa Margreta was waiting on pins and needles.

'I was delayed,' said Edevart.

She looked in the bundle at once and uttered a sigh of relief; 'Ay, here it is! Now let's be going home. Are you ready?'

'I am.'

They made no purchases and so had nothing to carry down to the boat. Outside she suddenly stops and asks: 'Have you been to the bakery?'

'To the bakery? No.'

'You have a white hand on your back,' says Lovisa Margreta and brushes him off. 'Where have you been?'

'In the kitchen.'

'A white hand,' says she. 'Five fingers. It's flour, and I can't get it off.'

Right then and there Edevart takes off his coat and, brushing and rubbing it, does all he can to remove the mark of the flour. Suddenly it flashes through his mind that it would serve her right if he were to return to the kitchen, again take her hand and so thank her that her fingers would crunch against that heavy ring of hers.

'It must have been that Jomfru of yours who had her arms around you,' says Lovisa Margreta with trembling lips.

'She has not had her arms around me.'

'That old sweetheart of yours who used to come out to see you on the sloop!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Edevart.

'Ho, then she did have her arms around you?'

Edevart: 'I wish to Heaven you'd stop talking!' He threw on his coat just as it was, and they went on.

'She might at least have first wiped the flour from her hands!' continued Lovisa Margreta.

Edevart remained silent. That miserable woman, that

she-devil! How cunningly she had revenged herself upon him! He was disgusted with himself, as well, for having stopped right there in the middle of the yard to take off his coat and brush it—the little devil might easily have been standing in one of the windows and chuckling to herself as she watched him!

'I ought to have gone with the bundle myself and exchanged it,' said Lovisa Margreta.

'I wish you had.'

'Ay, but I couldn't very well; I didn't want to show myself, for fear they'd say I was hanging around their kitchen waiting for an invitation.'

On the way home she chided Edevart so continuously that at length he told her everything. He was entirely guiltless in the matter, wasn't he? He was not obliged to lie to set her straight about things; his conscience was perfectly clear. And it became at once apparent to Lovisa Margreta that it was she herself more than Edevart upon whom the Jomfru had intended to revenge herself; but she took the matter sweetly and said in a joking manner somewhat tinged with grief: 'I'll be afraid to let you go alone to the store again after this!' A pleasantry uttered with a smile, a poor little joyless smile. But the memory of the affair stuck in her mind and caused her affection for Edevart to flare up anew; once again she bustled about him early and late as she had not done since their first days together. But at length, this mood of hers passed; she had something else to think about.

She asked Edevart: 'Aren't you going home to Polden to settle up your affairs?'

'Ay,' answered Edevart.

But day after day and week after week passed and Edevart still stayed on; he made no move to leave. And things turned out pretty well, even so; he received money once again from Paulina as soon as she had sold the new store

goods he had sent her. He could now buy food from Knoff and continue to keep the three of them alive.

After a time had passed, Lovisa Margreta asked again: 'Hadn't you better be getting ready?'

'Ay,' answered Edevart.

'For there isn't much time left now.'

'How about it, have you bought your ticket?' he asked.

'Ticket? No. I didn't think I was to go over to America again, I thought I was to stay here.'

'That's what I thought, too!' said Edevart darkly.

'Ay, but I can't go on living here. Don't let's talk any more about it. I must try it over there again. One place or another, maybe out west.'

'Ho, so you aren't sure what you'll do with yourself over there either, eh?'

'I don't know,' she replied. 'But I'll do all I can and think of nothing else. Ay, now you're laughing and thinking I'm undecided, but don't you see, I've children over there!'

'No, it's here you have a child,' he said.

Silence.

'Have you enough money for a ticket?'

Quite frankly she replied: 'Ay, Anders Vaade will let me have some.'

No longer were they considerate of each other's feelings. Only a few months ago and Edevart would have considered it an insult that she should accept a loan from any one else, and only a few months ago she would not have dreamed of asking anyone but Edevart. Oh, they had both got over their blissful intoxication; completely disillusioned they were, and no longer forbearing toward each other. Formerly she had denied herself one pleasure out of deference to him—the wearing of her rings. Ay, but now she suddenly took to slipping them on her fingers again—they were pretty, so why should she hide them

away? He saw but said nothing, it did not affect him particularly and, although he did not know where she had got hold of these rings, he did not even take the trouble to ask. And what was more, when occasionally she would bring up the affair of the five white fingers on the back of his coat, she would laugh heartily as though it had been a great joke and would ask if he wouldn't like to go back and have the prank repeated.

'Ay,' he replied. 'The next time Anders Vaade comes to the store, I'll sneak off to the kitchen so as to leave you and him alone together.'

'Ay, Anders Vaade, he's not so bad, I want you to know,' said she to defend him. 'And he really was a little bit in love with me, too—he's the one I got the pearl ring from. That was one Christmas in America.'

Edevart replied: 'I could have got one thing or another from that Jomfru of mine, too——'

No, they were no longer considerate of each other's feelings. That which had once bound their hearts together now lay in tatters behind them and they had nothing to look forward to. They had become vagabonds in love, as well.

'There are only two weeks left now,' said Lovisa Margreta.

'Two weeks for what?'

'That's when we'll be leaving. Now you will have to be getting yourself ready.'

'But if you were to come up home with me and look around a bit,' said Edevart to test her, 'maybe you'd find you'd like to stay there.'

'You haven't built yet, have you?'

'Build, build, build! Are you really accustomed to such marvellous things, Lovisa Margreta!'

'No,' said she humbly. 'No, God knows that as well as I! But you suggested it yourself, and that's the only reason I mentioned it.'

Edevart: 'I'll build; it will take time, but I'll build. I'll put up a neat little house for us three. Shall we start out for Polden and decide on a place to build?'

'I'll go with you,' she answered.

Agreed. But she herself was in a hurry to be off at once; it was as though she had no great faith in the result of this expedition and wanted to be certain that she could return in time for the departure of the emigrants. And even Edevart himself was doubtful; he, too, doubted that their trip north would bear fruit. And then what was he to tell folk up in Polden when he arrived with this woman and this child? And what would folk say?

Oh, what difference did that make!

A bit of sorrow for Haabjørg. She had now received two dolls from Juliet Knoff and was to go back again to stay overnight with her a third time and this time would receive a kitten; now there would be no kitten. Edevart had to promise that she might have any number of kittens when they reached the end of their journey.

They closed the doors of the cottage and rowed away from Doppen; the place was deserted once more. No one there to see them leave, only the murmur from the waterfall followed them out into the cove. They stopped in to see their neighbour, Karel, and asked him to keep an eye on Doppen until some later time.

They arrived by boat in Polden Fjord.

Edevart was in rather low spirits; this time he was returning home with neither a fish sloop nor a boat deeply laden with store goods; this time he was bringing with him simply two strangers. What would his father and sisters say? But most of all, what would Joakim say?

As they came gliding into the bay, they saw folk at work on the ledges, curious folk, who stood in ranks and stared in amazement. Edevart cringed a bit as he sat there on the thwart.

Well, well, so this year, too, the old skipper from Ofoten had come here to dry his cargo. He had not returned the money he had borrowed from Edevart the previous year; no, he hadn't been able to do that, for that son of his, Pedlar Nils, had caused him a good bit of trouble. But at any rate, he had scraped together what money he could and this year as well had bought up a cargo of fish.

They landed near one of the boat-houses and walked up into the village, Edevart carrying the luggage. How would things turn out?

Things turned out by no means badly; Lovisa Margreta had been enlivened by the voyage; it had been a change of environment for her. No, this was nothing like walking about Doppen in her own footsteps all day long; she was gentle and friendly, and captivated Paulina at once. Haabjørg enjoyed herself from the first moment; she was immediately given the store cat and her litter of kittens, and she made friends with Edevart's aged father and told him about America. Joakim was not home.

No, really, things did not turn out so badly. The mere fact that the buildings were painted white put Lovisa Margreta in a happy frame of mind and she said: 'My, but this is a big building, this house of yours here, Edevart! With stone steps and all!'

'No, it's anything but big,' he answered. 'But it has always been good enough for us.' Embarrassed, he showed her the store with its few shelves and bins, then his little office, and at length his even smaller bedroom. Everything neat and clean, but so tiny. He asked: 'Can you make yourself comfortable here in the bedroom, do you think?'

'Ay, of course,' she replied. 'Why not?'

He: 'It will only be at first, for then I'll begin building.'

'Where is Haabjørg to sleep?'

'We'll think about that,' he answered. 'How about letting her sleep with Paulina? They're such good friends.'

'Ho, and yourself? Are you to be out of a home?'

'Me? Don't worry about me! I can sleep anywhere!'

They went out about the farm and looked in the little cow shed; Lovisa Margreta sniffed the smell of it and; 'Lord,' she said, 'how it brings it all back! To-night when the cows come in, I'll milk!'

Edevart returned to the store and went over the stock with Paulina to learn what goods had been sold out. 'We ought to be able to replenish our stock,' he said. 'Where is that Hosea?'

'Hosea? Ay, she's over living with Ezra. What do you think they did this summer but run off and get married!' said Paulina, laughing. 'It was a matter of life or death for that lad, ha, ha, ha! And I never once dared to write you and tell you about it. Oh, well, they're getting along real well for all that. That Ezra, he's his own master and he's spent the whole summer digging in that bog of his and its a miracle what he's managed to grow there. They already have two cows. What was I going to ask you? Is that the lady you and I wrote to in America?'

'Ay, that's the one. Didn't she come flying, though!'

'Is she married?'

'Ay, but her husband disappeared.'

'You said that she was foolish in the head. I don't see any signs of that.'

'No, she must have got over it. That's something I don't trouble myself about. Where's Joakim?'

'In Kvæ Fjord. He wanted to try the seine again. It will be only a short trip between harvests, that's sure. But he's already struck herring.'

Edevart cried: 'Struck herring?'

'Ay, twice, he writes—fat herring, high-grade herring. It's nothing like the strike he made in Outer Polden, he writes, but his fish are high grade and that will mean a fair profit for his summer's work.'

'That's fine! That Joakim, he's made of luck!'

'He needed a bit of luck right now,' said Paulina. 'That's why he went out. He wants to enlarge the cow barn.'

'Isn't the cow barn big enough as it is?'

'No. Not since we got us another cow. And next year it may be that we'll get us yet another one. You have no idea what crops he's getting from the land since he began to clear it and manure it with seaweed.'

'That's fine!' mumbled Edevart again. 'Who's with him on the seine?'

'I don't know how many he has, but there's Ezra and Karolus and Teodor. . . .'

When evening came, Lovisa Margreta milked the cows and later laughed with tears in her eyes and chided herself because her hands, now out of practice and unused to such work, had been seized by cramps.

Thus ended the first day.

But more days came and went and all was no longer simply fun. Paulina talked seriously with Edevart and showed him that all the most important goods were sold out again, so that folk came to the store and found nothing they wanted. Look, folk had become more and more accustomed to getting everything they needed at the store; they no longer asked simply for molasses, coffee, and whole wheat; they now asked for axes which they had formerly got from the blacksmith, and for boat equipment which before had been brought home from Bergen by those who had journeyed there on the fish-sloops, and now that it was nearing St. Olaf's day in Nordland, they had been asking for blades for their scythes—the store ought not to let much time go by without having such goods on hand.

'No, naturally,' said Edevart.

Then there was the book in the office; Paulina showed her brother the book, be good enough to see here! She

had not given credit save in cases where it would be certain that the money would be paid on the day the Ofoten Skipper cleared with his cargo. And the cash she had taken in, she had already sent him by mail.

Silence. Edevart was unmoved. All right, then Paulina would have to tell him; out with it, she would no longer keep the matter secret: Gabrielsen had started up in business again!

'Ho!' said Edevart. 'So he's started up again!'

'In his wife's name. She got surety from her people. They're to do business in a grand way, I hear, and hardly any one ever comes any more to the store here in Polden.'

Edevart sat on the edge of a bin and listened to her. When Paulina had waited for a few moments, she asked: 'Ay, and what are we going to do about it?'

'We'll get in some fresh goods,' answered Edevart.

'Oh, if we only could!' she said.

'What do you mean?' he asked, feigning surprise. 'Just write out a list of the goods you want and when you're finished with it, all you have to do is to hand it to me!'

'Is that all there is to it!' said she, her eyes aglow. Oh, that big brother of hers!

Edevart, persistently: 'You're a polite youngster, Paulina! Do you think I'm bankrupt? I'm good for far more than ever you can write down. I've a farm down south and houses in good condition and several beds with all that goes with them, and besides all that, I have a harvest in the fields and a boat at the landing—'

No, Edevart was not discouraged. Could things be going any better than they were? Lovisa Margreta was enchanted with this new place she had come to and by the folk and by the animals, and not a single soul in Polden had expressed surprise that he had brought back home with him two unknown ladies. Was anything the matter, then? His hopes rose and he even began to look more cheerful.

He went with his two guests to call upon Hosea, his sister who had married Ezra and who was now living with him on the new place. No regular roadway led there as yet, simply a foot-path up over the marsh and the hill; he had to carry both mother and daughter over the wettest places, but if he knew that Ezra at all, one of the first things he would do would be to build him a good wide road.

Far away is a solitary woman at work in a field and that is Hosea. God save us, Hosea! There she stood, hoeing potatoes for the last time, and well indeed she looked. Observing the approach of strangers, she flew into the house to put on more clothes in order to hide a certain roundness. . . .

Lovisa Margreta shook her head sadly and said: 'Just as I, too, used to work alone in the potato patch back home at Doppen!' But she did not permit her nostalgia to overwhelm her; instead she clapped her hands joyfully because everything here seemed so bright and new—just look, two windows in the main room, and a bedroom up under the gable, and everything she saw brand new! From the windows she could look far out across the green growing fields of the bog to the ledge where people were at work, and from there, out across the bay to where the mountains rose. A sweet and lovely view, it was.

'What's this I hear about you running off and getting married, Hosea?' asked Edevart.

'H'm, do you think he would leave me in peace!' she answered with a smile.

They went out to look at the cow stable which had stalls enough for two more cows than Hosea owned thus far and which even had a stall for the horse they would some day be getting. Their farm buildings were substantial indeed—the barn was even equipped with a threshing floor. The little hay barn at Doppen was no more than a shed compared with Ezra's mighty building.

That devil of an Ezra, he didn't stop at anything! But he must owe a good bit on his buildings, no doubt about that. What of it? Hosea was satisfied, wasn't she? She considered herself extremely fortunate; Ezra worked like an ant and was always cheerful and kind—wonderful it was to watch him digging away at his ditches down there in the moor and tapping off water so that it would spurt and leap like a cataract. 'Ha, ha, ha!' she laughed. 'When he's ready to let go a big dam he calls me to come and see it. Ho, there's a lad for you!'

'Does he have any one to help him in the bog?'

'Now and then. Sometimes Joakim comes to lend him a hand, but Joakim has so much to do on his own place. And when it comes to laying out fields, there's two of us now you see!' answered Hosea proudly. 'Ezra, he cuts the turf and loosens it and I follow along behind him with a big hook and turn it over. He's very particular to have nice even rows, and so am I, for that matter. It's pleasant work. We work in the evening after supper and don't go home until late. Maybe you'd both like to go down to the bog and see how nicely things are growing there?'

Edevart had long since lost all interest in farming and his sister's chatter tired him. He answered: 'Oh, no, I don't believe so, not to-day.'

'Oh, no,' Hosea repeated and did not urge him further.

He motioned toward his guests and said: 'Look, though, those two there have just come back from America and have seen much grander things than you have here—enormous machines pulled by horses.'

'That's all very well,' said Hosea. 'We could plough with a horse ourselves, for that matter; but first we'll have to wait till we have our own horse. We can't afford to rent one. But things are going all right as they are; already we have two cows.'

Hosea was proud of the things she had—ay, just as Lovisa Margreta had been that day many years ago when

she had shown Edevart her sheepskins and the rugs she had woven. Many years ago. . . .

Hosea gave them milk and waffles but coffee they declined.

On the way home Lovisa Margreta was sweet and charming, really pleased with what she had seen. And Edevart understood from this that she was so satisfied with things as she found them here, that now she would be willing to remain in Polden, to settle down here in Polden.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PAULINA had given Edevart a long list of goods the store was in need of and for the time being he was carrying it about in his pocket. But he was not downhearted. All was well as far as Lovisa Margreta was concerned and he decided to go calling on a few of his neighbours simply to avoid appearing high and mighty toward his old acquaintances. He no longer feared embarrassing questions about the two strange ladies; they were simply a widow and her daughter, those from whom he had bought that farm of his down south—since they had come all the way from America to see their old home, far be it from him to drive them away!

He was friendly with folk and talked with them for hours at a time; this was not because he particularly enjoyed it, but because he was obliged to observe the customs of the place. He did not take Lovisa Margreta with him as he went from cottage to cottage; he respected her elegance. And besides, she wore city finery and curled her hair with an iron and such things were not in accordance with custom and tradition in Polden. But several of the neighbour women would occasionally come to see her and since she was cordial and patient and chatted with them about America, they felt kindly disposed toward the widow. She had been to the ends of the earth, she had, and would be able to give good advice in various matters.

Edevart made another trip out to see Hosea; he was afraid that he had hurt her feelings by his lack of interest in her farm. Poor little Hosea, who not so long since had been so small and who had thanked him with those thin childish hands of hers, there she now stood in field

and meadow doing heavy work and laughing in spite of it all. And that was what it was to be pleased with one's lot in life. This time he went alone to see her and took with him several yards of fine cloth from the store. And Hosea who was not blessed with many clothes, thanked him joyfully for his gift. 'Oh, you!' she said with emotion. 'You haven't changed a bit!'

They climbed the slope to where the potatoes grew, they walked down to the bog—that wide expanse traversed by many ditches, large and small, where grain was growing in straight lines and billowing in the breeze. Edevart pretended to be more overcome than he really was, simply to make his sister happy and he asked many playful questions in order to hear her laugh.

'But how is it now, are you left in peace here?' he asked.

Hosea understood what he meant and answered: 'I've had no trouble yet.'

'No cries from the bog any more?'

'No,' said she with a roguish smile. 'No wailing of the dead!'

'Just the same it was a chance you took to get married and come out here to live so far from folk in the village.'

'I never think of it like that any more,' answered Hosea. 'Daytime I have so much to do and at night I go to bed trusting in the Lord.'

'I don't know whether I'd be willing to do it,' he said quite seriously.

'Why—because of the corpse? That's buried in the churchyard now.'

'Ay, ay, I don't want to scare you, but some night there might come cries from the bog again.'

'No,' said she, laughing. 'For it never was the Skipper that cried.'

He started and asked curtly: 'Who was it?' But when he noticed that she hesitated to answer, a light dawned

on him and he suddenly exclaimed: 'Oh, now I see through it!'

'Ay, did you ever hear of any one like that lad!' said she. 'But it was August that put him up to it.'

'Ay, that August! Ho, so it was August that put him up to it?'

'In order to help him. He wanted something to be done about the bog and it was a beginning when they dug up the Skipper and that cow of Martinus'. Look, here's the big ditch they dug!'

Edevart began to laugh. 'Ho, and so he sneaked down to the bog and bellowed those Sunday afternoons? No, that's the funniest thing I ever heard!'

Hosea: 'But Lord bless you, you mustn't breathe a word of it!'

'I'll never tell. How did you get to know it yourself?'

'Oh, it just happened that I wouldn't marry him and live here with spooks and cries from the dead all the days of my life, so then he admitted it.'

'Did he laugh about it?'

'Ay, he put his hand over his mouth and had to laugh. I was so mad I could have given him a beating, for he had certainly scared the wits out of all of us, but he didn't care a bit how mad I was, he said so many funny things that I had to laugh myself. And the end of it was that the corpse was laid away in the churchyard and that was a blessing for all of us. Will you just look at those grain fields!'

'Wonderful!'

'I'm beginning to fret a bit about those hay fields off there,' said she. 'He ought to be home right now to mow them. Isn't it thick with grass over there? Two cows! What was it I was going to ask you—are you going to get married to her?'

'No, I don't know. What do you think about it?'

'She's scandalously pretty and I hear that she doesn't

consider herself too grand to milk the cows. Ay, I think you should.'

'H'm. Well, such wild things do happen!'

Edevart was going to the post office and Lovisa Margreta sat writing letters to her children in America. She was as clumsy as he in the matter of writing—she who was otherwise so clever was simply helpless when she tried to compose a letter and many were the stupid mistakes she made. In the spoken word, however, she had no difficulty in making herself understood and it would be safe to say that sometimes her tongue was more supple than his, so that Edevart was obliged to keep still.

Oh, yes, he was going to the post office, for he wished to create the impression that he had really sent that large order for goods to the merchant in Trondhjem. But before leaving, there was one thing he wished to say to Lovisa Margreta; as soon as she had finished her writing, he would broach the subject to her, for he had been brooding over it for some time—no harm in mentioning it, was there?

'H'm! There's something I've been thinking about,' he said. 'How was it you happened to ask Anders Vaade for money?'

She was taken aback by this and stammered: 'I don't know. It just came about.'

'You should have come to me.'

'Oh.'

'Ay, that you should. But anyway, it's all the same now, or isn't it? You're thinking of staying here now, aren't you? You won't be needing ticket money.'

Lovisa Margreta did not reply.

'Or what?' he repeated and looked suddenly in her face. And his expression indicated that her silence was extremely hard to bear.

'I don't know,' she said. 'Let me think it over. If we

settle down here, then we'll never be able to do anything else, we'll simply have to live here till we die.'

'What of it?'

'It's just that I've children over there and all that——'

The same old argument again, back and forth; she was by no means cured of her fancy to be floundering about. But even now she was kind and agreeable and opened the letter she had written in order to add a postscript to the effect that she was still uncertain in her mind. Back and forth—and at length she reminded him of the promise he had made her on a certain night that he would go with her across the ocean. And to this Edevart could find nothing to say.

He returned from the post office with two letters for her, one from Head-clerk Lorensen in regard to the voyage, she said, and the other from her children in America. She read the letters and was silent.

And from that day on Lovisa Margreta no longer went into ecstasies over anything there in Polden, and no longer did she offer to milk the cows. Her one interest was to talk Edevart over into leaving for America with her and each time Edevart hemmed and hawed and let the days go by.

They never came into open conflict, they merely talked together of America and bandied words and were long-suffering with each other.

Had Norway become utterly unendurable for one who was, after all, no more than a Fosenland peasant? No more than the woman from Doppen?

Ay, Edevart, for she who had once been merely from Doppen had later turned out to be from many places. America was so large. If you didn't like to stay in one place, you could go off to some other place. Now, for instance, she had never been to Florida, and since she had read those books. . . .

But wasn't it true that those children of hers had found

permanent places in New York? He thought she had wanted to be where they were.

For a while, perhaps; ay, naturally she would want to stop off and see her children and live in New York for a time. However, her children were now grown up and no longer needed her, and anyway she had already spent two years in New York. That had been in the beginning.

Had she then gone away from the home she had there?

Ay, of course. Moved to another place; was there anything so strange about that?

'No,' answered Edevart, himself a vagabond, at heart much like herself. That was all right, he thought; but they could move from one place to another here in Norway, couldn't they? From Polden back to Doppen.

'Oh, don't mention that any more!' she begged, hurt. 'I couldn't even think of that. Didn't you see how things were with Hosea, that sister of yours? She was simply a slave to her plots of ground and her two cows! It gives me the creeps!'

'Hosea!' he cried. 'She's happy in the life she's living!'

'All right. Then she's happy the same as Karel is, because she doesn't know anything about a better way of living!'

Silence.

'I thought you gave me to understand that you liked it and felt at home here—what's the trouble now?'

She answered: 'I couldn't very well complain about anything while I'm here as a guest. It's pleasant enough here for a while, just as it is at Doppen. And now don't let's talk any more about it.'

'All right.' No, he would not try to egg her on, things were bad enough as they were. He had hinted that she ought to have come to him for money instead of going to Anders Vaade and now it might happen that she would take him at his word. But there was just one thing he wished her to recall: 'Didn't you write me that you

couldn't get used to it for a single day over there in America either?'

'Ay, I felt unsettled there, too,' she answered. 'What I wrote you was true. And that was why I travelled from place to place to look around. But anyway it was better there than here.'

Back and forth. But she stuck to her point.

The decisive moment came the following day: she begged him sweetly to be serious and get himself ready to set out the next day; it was high time they were starting back to Doppen.

To-morrow? That was like having a rope tied around his neck. So she had definitely decided to leave the country again?

Ay, she *must* be moving on.

Must?

'I didn't want to tell you before,' she replied. No doubt her remark had simply slipped from her tongue, but very well, she would now stake everything on the turn of one card. Oh, and she put her last ounce of effort into this one final attempt to win over that stubborn sweetheart of hers, perhaps not even stopping to consider that thereby she was forcing a verdict and would herself be obliged to bear the consequences. 'The children write that their father has been found,' she said.

A cry from Edevart: 'Is—what are you saying—has he been found?'

'So they write.'

That woke him up; in truth, he became very much interested. Whether it had been a desperate move on her part or a statement of the truth, she now at least had the satisfaction of seeing him disturbed.

'It isn't really the truth, is it?' he asked.

'Ay, who would have believed it possible!'

'But it's a fact that you're divorced from him, isn't it?'

'Ay. Oh, yes, I'm that all right, but——'

'But you want to go back to him?'

'What am I to do? I can't very well let him stay there alone.'

'Ho!' said he, nodding his head and thinking things over. But in reality he was depressed no more than he had been, the news had not crushed him, no, hadn't crushed him at all—in fact he was after a fashion relieved, for now he was free from uncertainty.

'So you can see why we can't wait any longer,' said she.

Edevart, confused: 'Ay, but—in that case I can't very well go along, can I?'

'Ay—can't you?'

'How—why, what do you mean?'

She tried at once to retreat from her difficulty; oh, and clever and crafty she showed herself to be. 'Haakon hasn't come clear home to the children,' she said, 'it's just that they've heard where he is.'

'Ho, but when they find him and bring him home—I don't understand. Are you thinking of having two husbands?'

'What am I going to do?' she sobbed and tears came into her eyes. 'But I *must* go back! They write me that!'

'Was that in the last letter?'

Again she was quick and found a way out of her difficulty. There was a chance that he might ask to see the letter and perhaps take it away from her and have it translated by that August comrade of his, who knew the English language; so she anticipated his demand and said: 'It's too bad, but I burned the letter; otherwise I'd be able to show it to you.'

'You burned it?'

'Ay. So that no one here might see that I was married. I did it most of all for your sake.'

They both thought for a long time. If the whole thing had been an invention on her part in order to gain her end,

its effect was merely to precipitate matters; nevertheless, it was too late for her to take back her words.

'Ay, ay, then the whole thing is over!' said he.

'Oh, God! that's the way it seems!' she cried. Naturally, she was tender and sorrowful, whispering almost inaudibly and crying a little. But even so, she too seemed able to stand it—ay, Lovisa Margreta could stand it.

'H'm, so it's the end, is it?' said Edevart.

She laid her hand on his and remained silent.

'What about Haabjørg now?' he asked.

'Ay, don't you think I too have thought about Haabjørg! She is still very small, so of course she must go with me. You won't go with us, is that what I'm to understand?'

'No!' he answered firmly.

'Poor Edevart!' said she, becoming even more tender. 'Must we both go away and leave you, then!'

'That's how it looks. Ay, I'll row you both out to the steamer to-morrow.'

'Ay, but you'll come with us as far as Doppen, won't you?'

He answered as though deeply wounded, as though frightfully scorned and hurt: 'Ay, if it makes any difference to you.'

'Oh, as though it didn't make any difference! How can you have the heart to talk in such a way?'

They must be together at Doppen for one last time. . . .

He did not go with them to Doppen, he gave up that plan at the last minute. He had put in a hard night without sleep or rest and it no longer seemed easy for him to lose her and furthermore he was worried because he would be unable to advance her travel money; he was nothing less than destitute.

After rowing his ladies out to the steamer landing, ill and faint-hearted as he was, he tried to hide himself away

until the steamer arrived, but in this he was unsuccessful. Little Haabjørg, who was everywhere at once, at length found him on the top floor of the warehouse. There he sat, leaning disconsolately forward, his face in his hands.

'Are you here?' said Haabjørg. 'Mama's looking everywhere for you.'

'Is she?' he answered and followed her.

The child pointed to him triumphantly. 'I found him up there, Mama, up under the roof! Ha, ha, ha!'

Lovisa Margreta no doubt realized how he felt; she was gentle and indulgent with him and told the child that she ought to have left him in peace—he had so many things on his mind. 'Come over here, Edevart, and sit on my cape!' she said spreading it out for him.

Why couldn't he remain her hero and stand by her till the very end? It was hard, oh, so hard for him to part from her now—was it nothing that she had been the first deep love of his youth; ay, at this moment he would in all certainty have followed her to Florida, if only he had had money enough.

Did she realize how poor he was? God knows. 'You're so pale,' said she and let her friendly hand steal into his.

'I don't feel well,' he answered.

'No, you don't feel well.'

'I'd take a drink, if I had it now.'

'Don't you suppose you can get something here?'

'Oh, no. And anyway it wouldn't do any good. Lovisa Margreta—Lovisa Margreta—Lovisa Margreta!' he murmured, shaking his head.

She herself was deeply affected and her face was pale; she wanted in some way to soothe him, help him. Suddenly she said: 'You're too sick to come with us.'

'My heart is heavy, that's all—it just came over me.'

'You couldn't stand it,' she said sympathetically. 'You'd better row back home and go to bed.'

'I'd be ashamed to do that.'

'No, no, don't take it that way. We'll be back at Doppen by to-morrow evening.'

At this Edevart collapsed; he turned away and answered: 'Ay, and I'll not be there!'

In order to brace him up she pretended to be braver than she really was; she promised to write to him. 'And that's because I'm in love with you,' said she even now at the very end. 'I love you more than any one else in the world, and that you must know.'

'Ay, but I don't see how that makes much difference; we have to part from each other just the same.'

'Ay, but now you must listen,' she continued as though she really meant it. 'I don't know whether I'll be able to get along over there either; no, maybe I won't at all, and in that case I'll come right back to you. Oh, yes, I'm almost certain of that. Or maybe you'll be coming to me? That might happen, too.'

'Ay, nothing is really impossible, is it?' he said more cheerfully.

'There, you see! And so we aren't really parting forever. The one trouble is that I might get to be too old for you.'

'Oh, you too old? I'm older than you are anyway.'

'Yes, yes; that I know. But even so, we mustn't wait too long before we meet again. Now see that you get home all right!'

'No,' he said, for politeness' sake. 'Really I must try to go with you now.'

She spoke as though for her own good: 'You mustn't even think of it, Edevart; it would make it harder for both of us. Maybe I won't always be as brave as I am now.'

'South-bound steamer passengers, get into the boat!' warned the ship agent in a loud voice.

The steamer was in sight and already sounding her siren. General unrest ashore, everyone picking up his

luggage—a quick grasping of hands as a final gesture of farewell, no time for kisses now.

Where was Haabjørg? Oh, that young one, always roaming about! 'Haa-bjørg!' screamed her mother. 'Here I am!' answered Haabjørg from somewhere. Oh, yes, Haabjørg had found her way alone and was already in the lighter. She stood dipping out water with an enormous bailing can—her hat had slipped from her head and was hanging down her back. That young one! It was an amusing sight and everyone smiled.

Edevart sat in the four-oar rowing home. Ay, and now what did his life amount to? Lovisa Margreta had not brought up the matter of travel money and Edevart himself had refrained from mentioning it—appearances had been kept up, but in any event, nothing further than appearances. There he sat. What would August have done in his place? Thrown back his head and snapped his fingers! Edevart slumped down in his seat.

But so it goes, ay, everything goes.

The days passed, time passed. He received a letter from Lovisa Margreta who wrote that she was setting out now, but that she would surely return. There it was in her own handwriting. Oh, a dear letter and a sweet letter, a bit hasty and incoherent, but altogether like her when she wrote. The blessed creature, she wasn't sailing away from him like a fugitive, she had thought of him and had wanted to say something to cheer him up. Ay, but she hadn't succeeded. And now he must hear! Romeo had made a great fuss over Haabjørg again and had given her many presents and hadn't wanted to let her go, and at last Madam Knoff herself had come out and asked if Haabjørg couldn't be left behind in Norway to live with them and have everything she wanted. Yes, and Lovisa Margreta had hemmed and hawed and thought that for Edevart's sake, so that he wouldn't be left so alone, this would be a good thing, but do you think for a moment

that those people had been polite enough to ask her into the house? What do you think of that! For when they had wanted her to do such a big thing as that for them, they might at least have shown her some respect, she was the child's mother, but no, not even after asking her to hand over the child, her own flesh and blood, to them! And not alone that, for if it happened that they got hold of Haabjørg now, it might be that they would never let her go again and when she grew up then Romeo would probably marry her so that the child would never get away from there and see anything of the world. No, thanks!

'And now, Edevart, what do you think, should I have done it? I leave it to you. But I am seriously afraid that if you came down to try to see her as you would have the greatest right to do, they wouldn't let you, for they are so proud and just like they were gods to us others, they who haven't any bringing up, although I have seen more of the world than they can show me. . . .

Here at Doppen everything is lonesome and forlorn without you. I hope you got back home all right although you were pale as death. Haabjørg and me you mustn't worry about, we got up to Doppen all right because Anders Vaade rowed us up and helped us to get things ready, but Anders Vaade isn't in my thoughts so much as a minute of the day, that you must know, for then I could have done it already in America when they were in love with me, but never so much as a sign from me. It is true when I say it that no one will ever take me away from you. . . .

When you come back you will find food left here, but I have taken away everything that can spoil and made things tidy after us. I am not wearing my rings any more and have left one of them here for you in the table drawer although you can't wear it, but give it to Paulina from me. . . .

To-morrow we'll be going aboard from here, but you mustn't worry about us any at all, for I have travelled so much and changed trains and ridden night and day. *Farvel* for now, it won't be for life and later I'll write you more. . . .

And not a word about her husband who had turned up again.

The days passed and soon Joakim would be returning from the fishing; Edevart dreaded to meet him. All in all, things had gone so badly for him that he felt sick at heart and would gladly have avoided seeing any one at all. Paulina had become impatient and was fretting because the merchandise had not come for the store; what had happened to it? She had ordered such a long list of goods, and the days passed with no word from the steamer landing that the cases had arrived. Where were they, then? Edevart decided to go south to look into the matter; he took what was left of the ready cash in the store and set out.

Naturally there was but one place where he might go and that was Doppen; he could eat up the food which had been left and sit there once more and twiddle his thumbs.

Before reaching his final destination, however, August stopped him on the pier and said: 'So you didn't move on to America with the others?'

'No,' replied Edevart. 'The trouble was I couldn't afford it.'

August nodded: 'That's what I thought!'

'I couldn't manage to sell a thing up in Polden, no one had a single King's *skilling*. Naturally I had all kinds of money coming to me, but I won't be getting any of that in my hands until the Ofoten Skipper settles up with the ledge folk. And that Skipper has borrowed some money from me in the bargain.'

'What will we do now?' asked August.

'You're asking me and I you.'

'Ay, but what brought you here? You must have had some reason for coming. I was standing right here on the dock when they set out. She went along with them.'

'I know.'

'There was a whole crowd of them; I counted fifteen as they went aboard. What did you say you came here for?'

'Oh, I was left alone and there was nothing for me to do. I came to see you.'

'If only we could both of us get out of here,' said August ruefully.

Edevart: 'I don't know how I'm going to get away from here—I haven't a penny to my name.'

August: 'You've a watch and a gold ring.' But August for his own part was anything but sure of himself just now; he mumbled darkly to the effect that he was a simpleton and had allowed himself to be made a fool of.

Edevart was considerably relieved to learn that others, too, had made fools of themselves and questioned his comrade further. But no, he was unable to learn a thing; nevertheless, he realized that since August had stayed in one place for over a year, he must have a good reason for doing so; and probably the fact that he no longer had his gold ring had something to do with it. Edevart came straight to the point and asked: 'Where is that gold ring of yours?'

August: 'Where is it? I know where it is.'

'Can't you get it back?'

'No, it doesn't look like it.'

'Don't you ever see her?'

'I see her every day. What makes you ask?'

'No, it's none of my business,' admitted Edevart. 'But who is it?'

'I'm not telling,' answered August.

'Ho!'

'No, for she's too grand a lady and I'm not telling. But it's just as though Satan himself stuck his fingers into the mess. The thing's been going on for over a year now.'

'I know all about it!'

'But this much I'll tell you, Edevart, that I was absolutely innocent in the way I got into it.'

'I know all about that, too, for I myself was innocent in the way I got into trouble.'

'No, you saw exactly what you were about; but as for me, they pulled the wool over my eyes.'

'How's that?'

'How's that? How was I to know that she was married when she didn't say anything about it? And I didn't find out about that till after it was too late.'

'Was she married? Can't you tell me who it was?'

August shook his head. 'She's too grand a lady,' said he.

Suddenly Edevart sees through it all, he recalls an enormous ring—ay, there it had been in all its unreasonableness encircling a certain middle finger and even so, too large. 'I know who it is!' he said.

'Ho, then you don't have to ask.'

'There's one devil of a woman, too! How did you ever get mixed up with her?'

'Don't talk about it! I had a ticket straight through to Trondhjem, but this is as far as I got and no further. Happy journey to the ticket, but wasn't that a trick of Fate? When I came ashore from the boat and met her, I didn't know a soul here. She asked me where I was from and when she heard, she wanted to know why you didn't come back and such like. And now I was simply to write you and tell you that I had become her sweetheart, she said. That was all I was supposed to do, said she. And she was so pleasant and pretty, too, she almost knocked me over. Now if I had known that she was married—but she said that she was the housekeeper here, Jomfru and all that, and "That's a pretty gold ring you have there," says she. "Will you take it?" says I. And that's the way it went.'

'Ay, but when you found out that she was married—?'

'Exactly! But then it was too late, do you hear! For I'm not a stick or a stone and so I was crazy about her

at once. I waited all that while for her to give in, but No. And now she is married to a jackass who is scared to death of a mouse, and what kind of a fellow is that for her to be married to! For she's a very pretty lady, I want to tell you, one of the grandest ladies I've seen in all my travelling around, so it isn't to be wondered at that I'm after her, but she merely laughs at me every time. But it's so bad now that I can't let her alone any more, for when I'm in love with some one, then it would take the Devil himself to pry me away from her. But I've never before in my life stayed in love with the same person for two whole years; but then you must also be remembering that this one here is a lady, and that never happened to me before, either. And as for that gold ring of mine, it's just that fact alone that makes me want her to keep it on her hand for the rest of her life just as a reminder, for she has wanted to give it back to me many times, but I always say no.'

'Ho, so she isn't really hanging on to the ring, then?'

'Ay, that's what I tell her, but only when I'm mad at her. But just the same, she's a fine person and shamefully pretty, and all this time she's slipped many a choice morsel of food out to me and for that I'll remember her as long as I live.'

'Ay,' said Edevart, nodding his head. 'I can see that you're in love with her all right.'

'Of course I am,' answered August. 'When I see her in the morning, then I'm walking in a fog right up to dinner time and at night when I eat my porridge, it tastes like meat in my mouth. Only the devil can understand it!' said August.

Edevart: 'You must try to get over it.'

'Ay, that's what I must, all right! If she hadn't been as she was, then I'd have left here long ago. What should I be staying on here for? That Romeo has given me a wee bit of a raise in wages and that's a fact, but is that any-

thing to keep me hanging around here! I'll kiss you tomorrow if it is!'

The comrades discussed the matter back and forth in all seriousness. Suddenly August had an idea and jumped up: 'Let's get out of this place!' he said. 'We'll take the first south-bound steamer; she'll be along in about a week. There's no sense sitting here any longer.'

'South-bound, did you say? Where shall we go?'

'South. That's better than north. What is there for us to do up north in Polden? We'll go south as far as our money will take us, and then we'll go ashore. I'll take my accordion along.'

Edevart rowed over to Doppen; he felt hungry as soon as he reached the place and began at once to search for something to eat. There was no bread, but there were plenty of crackers, ship's crackers—ay, and there was bacon, though no butter. Good.

It was lonely and desolate there. The beds were neatly made, everything scrubbed and in order, but now there was not a living soul in the house save him. The very walls were silent. If he had had a bottle, he would surely have taken a drink.

Outside everything was green and growing—the meadows ought to have been mowed long ago, the grain stood tall in the fields, and the potato patch, where Karel had been at work, was neatly cleared of weeds and hilled. And Lovisa Margreta had had the heart to go away and leave all this!

He wandered about this place of his until late in the evening and then he lay down in his own bed out in the hay barn. It became darker and darker; the waterfall murmured in his ears. He felt his solitude, felt like the last living man in the world—and big strong fellow that he was, he lay there feeling sorry for himself and weeping quietly.

In the morning he found the ring there in the drawer of the table. He was astonished to find that it was the pearl ring she had received from Anders Vaade, that it was not the other, the one she had perhaps bought herself, although he had never asked her where it had come from. God knows, Lovisa Margreta was so marvellously good, perhaps she had wanted to give him double pleasure by leaving him even her gift from Anders Vaade. This thought touched him and he began to weep again.

He looked for a scythe but could not find one anywhere about. No scythe hung in any of the buildings, for Haakon Doppen had perhaps never used a scythe in his life—no doubt his poor wife had been obliged to call in some neighbour to mow her meadow. So it was.

He rowed over to Karel's place to borrow a scythe and a whetstone. These he got. Karel said that he had wanted to send his boys over to Doppen to mow, but he hadn't been sure that that was what Edevart wanted. They had, however, taken care of the potatoes.

'Ay, and those boys of yours may have the potatoes in return for what they have done,' said Edevart.

They fell into conversation and chatted of various matters, of the harvests they might expect, of all the new emigrants to America who had distressed Karel by leaving home. 'That Anders Vaade has never wanted to do anything,' said Karel. 'He's not like his father who always worked for everything he had to his name. Anders, all he wanted to do was to go about in a long coat and try to look important. But the worst of it all was that he took others along with him, a whole crowd of folk, and mostly bright young lads in the bargain—I had a brother-in-law start off with them. And then that Lorensen from the store, he has never done anything else but belly-ache about Norway since the day he came home. Why didn't he stay away in the first place? No, he had to come back and talk others around to his way of thinking, that's what he

did. And now just let them try it. I wish them all luck, but it isn't a sure thing at all that they'll be happy there. Live better, Lorensen used to say over and over again. "How better?" I used to ask. So then he would finally come out with it that he meant richer food! Did you ever hear of such a thing! They can't get candy and raisins enough back home here so they must change the country they live in! Deserters, that's what they are! All right then, let them desert the home land!'

Edevart, who himself would have gone off with the rest if he had had sufficient money, merely nodded now and then. He said:

'I just happened to think that I'll be needing a rake as well. I can't find any kind of a tool at all back there at my place.'

He got a rake.

And now Karel put a question to him: 'H'm, so you've decided to sell Doppen, so I hear?'

'What? I don't know,' answered Edevart, wondering. 'Who told you that?'

'Oh, then there can't be anything to it. Romeo was anxious to sell it for you, he said, and asked me if I didn't want to buy it for my boys.'

A strange expression came over Edevart's face; he was filled with apprehension. What, was Romeo going to sell the place some day to take care of Edevart's debt to the store? 'I've never thought very seriously about it,' said he. 'But I remember now that I mentioned it to Romeo one time. He has a good memory, that lad!'

Karel: 'He offered it to me. But without the waterfall.'

'Ho, without the waterfall! Ay well, that was right!'

Edevart was even more bowed down in spirit as he rowed himself home. He had received a warning. However, what did he want with Doppen now that he was left alone again? In God's name, let Romeo have the place for the debt he owed the store.

On arriving home he immediately began to mow. He was completely out of balance with himself and his soul was almost torn to shreds; he pitched into his work with all his might and soon the sweat was rolling from his body. The scythe bit well into the dew-drenched meadow and wherever he went the grass fell hissing to the ground. If only there would be one more hour of daylight, he would finish mowing the first strip of the meadow and on the following morning spread out the hay, turn it at noon, and by evening begin to stack it. Oh, he was not the novice at farming his little brother Joakim thought he was; no, he knew how, all right!

He went to bed at the end of the day, snatched a couple of hours of sleep and sprang to his feet again.

The sky was sparkling and gave promise of another warm day. Then why not mow again, why not keep on mowing? It would be at least another seven hours before the dew would be gone and, by God, he'd show that Joakim! Tired and worn out after his work of the previous evening and without taking even a bite of food, he returned at once to the meadow.

He was a big strong lad and once more showed his worth; the scythe sang, the grass flowed fan-wise to the ground as he moved forward and he left a broad swath behind him. Of course, he was risking considerable by mowing his entire meadow at once without the certainty of several days of dry weather, but even so, he went right ahead.

When he was finished, he went in and hunted up something to eat, crackers and bacon; he made coffee and sweetened it with molasses; at ten o'clock the dew had evaporated and he began to spread out the heavy hay, twenty loads of hay. At length he was so exhausted that he could hardly stay on his feet, and as soon as he sat down, he fell asleep.

He awakened with a clear mind, sharpened by excite-

ment. He now recalled a number of things which before had merely brooded in his unconscious mind. He no longer felt that it would be an injustice to him if Romeo were to sell Doppen—that would be exactly what he deserved, for he had cheated old Knoff when he had bought fish for him in Lofoten several years ago and now it would mean simply that all those sly little coins were returning to their rightful owner.

So much for that.

But what about Lovisa Margreta now? That was a different matter. For the first time there flared up within him a feeling of bitterness toward her; had she not after a fashion abandoned him to run off with Anders Vaade and the others? And was it not she who was to blame from beginning to end for the fact that he now sat here a grown-up man so poor that he had not a thing in the world and again had to live on dried food as he had during the poorest days of his youth? He had a whole list of things against her. It seemed to him a miracle—a miracle that chilled his blood—how greatly she had changed. He was obliged to forget her passion and tenderness during her moments of complete surrender—oh, but even those moments, had not they sometimes been blotched with insincere words and outbursts which had made the whole affair merely vulgar? And how was it to be explained that she never seemed afraid of the consequences? Out there in the world she must have learned certain tricks of which he himself had heard no more than vaguest mention and which had always shocked him. And she had done other things which went against his grain: there he was, the son of religious parents and reared to piety, but Lovisa Margreta thought nothing at all of breaking the Sabbath by taking up her sewing, often at the very time the parson stood in the pulpit. Oh, she had become so independent, so sure of herself! All right as for that! But at the same time how far removed it was from her former timid in-

nocence. What did passion have to do with love? Did it do her any good or suit her taste, did it make her any happier, more joyful? It certainly wasn't badness as far as she was concerned, it was rather a case of acquired bravado. Those curls she now wore in her hair which weren't becoming to her anyway, that hat on her head, those neatly laced shoes, that city dress of hers—ay, and she had also worn something around her neck, something which simply made her face look older and more commonplace, not nearly so pretty—all this had spoiled her appearance! But she had kept on with it just the same—these were the things she had learned about and these were the things she must have. And what was the significance of that nonsense about putting a star flower in his buttonhole? They had used to do that on *picnics*, she said; she had merely embarrassed him by that, he had never experienced such a thing before. And then there were the times that she had to stop and stumble in order to find the right word in Norwegian— 'What do you call it now?' she would say. 'I know it all right in English!' No doubt that was meant sincerely enough, but it sounded so silly from one who was merely the woman from Doppen there in Fosenland. English, what was that! August knew Russian just as well, but he never was at a loss to find the right Norwegian word. Ay, and there she had gone, talking English in the store with Anders Vaade and Head-clerk Lorensen so that it was unendurable to go on listening to her. But on the other hand, had she ever troubled herself to get Haabjørg to sing an English song for him, for Edevart? Never! All right keep on with it, open up your mouth and talk English all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, go ahead! But he, Edevart, would have been an entirely different fellow to-day if he had never laid eyes upon Lovisa Margreta Doppen.

So much for that, too.

Luckily, he managed to save his hay—carrying it on

his back, he succeeded in getting it under cover before it spoiled, although he had done anything but wisely in mowing his entire meadow at once. So it went; luck was with him—to be sure, his whole body ached and he alternately laughed and groaned because he was so soft, yet his spirit knew no hurt; on the contrary. In the evening he made himself barley gruel and ate it with sweetened water—not such bad food for him after all and he thanked God that he had it to eat.

After finishing his work of carrying the hay into the barn, he rowed back to Karel's place to return the tools.

Finished at Doppen; finished with Doppen? At once. He simply walked around and said farewell to everything. A bit sad he still was because things had gone so badly for him, but there was nothing to do about that now. In the wood shed stood his new axe; he didn't want to leave it there all alone, but he didn't want to take it with him, either—he didn't want to own a single nail or sliver that pertained to Doppen. He drove the head of the axe into the block and let it remain thus. With that he walked over to say farewell to the cottage; his gaze fell upon the bed, memories flooded his mind and he broke down—a sob or two and a little cry escaped from his breast. And now he took back all the hard things he had thought about Lovisa Margreta, and with tears in his eyes regretted them.

August was ready.

'And just let me tell you this,' said he to Edevart. 'If it should turn out that I come to you and ask you to delay a couple of hours in order to give me more time to get ready, you mustn't let me do it!'

'All right!' answered Edevart without quite understanding his meaning.

They had the better part of the night ahead of them in which to wait for the south-bound mail steamer and August did all that was necessary to prepare for his de-

parture; Edevart caught a glimpse of him now and then scurrying back and forth between the houses as though he had no time to waste.

In the evening he came and said: 'I can't get ready in time to take this steamer.'

'What's that?'

'We'll have to wait over for the next south bound!'

'Nothing of the kind!' said Edevart.

August, curtly: 'Then you'll have to leave alone.'

This would be impossible for Edevart; he needed his comrade for various reasons. He asked: 'What's keeping you?'

'My wages,' answered August. 'I can't find that Romeo.'

This certainly could not be the truth; Edevart himself had had to go to much trouble to avoid Romeo, since he did not care to be seen in his new and wretched condition. He did not wish to encounter any one; he refused to go to see folk, and slept the entire night outside. 'I think you've already collected your wages,' said Edevart, without mincing matters.

'Ay, but it's something else,' answered August and went on his way.

Toward morning the mail steamer whistled and Edevart went down to the pier. August was not to be found; no one had seen him; Magnus who was acting as agent could not refrain from saying: 'It's just that he's afraid to go aboard—he's scared to death of the sea!'

Edevart sat down on a packing case and went to sleep.

After a time August appeared; he was in low spirits and let fall the almost empty sailor bag which he had been carrying under his arm. 'You shouldn't have let me go,' said he to Edevart. 'The whole thing came to nothing.'

Edevart: 'What's this you've been up to?'

'You mustn't ask questions about it,' answered August. 'But would it have been better if I had shot him?'

Edevart stared without comprehending a thing.

'And now the fact stands thus: here I am as you see me, I have my bag with me and am ready to leave.'

'I can't wait over here another whole week,' said Edevart, discouraged. 'Do you know, August, we can take the north bound which is due to-morrow night. What do you think of that idea?'

August thought. 'Ay,' he said. 'We'll take the north bound.'

All during the day August again scurried around as though he were very busy; he brought Edevart something to eat, and in the evening they threw themselves down behind a tan-vat and at length fell asleep.

When the hour of the night approached at which the north-bound ship was scheduled to arrive, both comrades awoke as though by instinct. They spoke only when necessary and August was extremely thoughtful. Suddenly he blurted out: 'When the ship whistles now, you just go aboard—I'll be along later.'

Edevart answered this. 'We'll go aboard together.'

'It's just that I want to say good-bye to some one,' muttered August. And when the steamer whistled, he jumped up and said, 'Ay, whether you laugh or cry about it, I won't be ready to take this boat either.'

Edevart held him back and said: 'Come on now, we're going aboard!'

'Let me go!' demanded August. 'Here's another good chance for me; that Magnus is busy at the dock, and she's in bed there alone again——'

When Edevart understood what he was talking about, he pulled his comrade with him and did not let go his arm until they were both on board.

Edevart asked: 'Did you get that ring of yours?'

August: 'The ring? I didn't want the ring. I'd be satisfied if she'd have it on her finger the day she's lowered into the grave. No, I didn't get anything else from her either, she wouldn't——'

'Have you tried it before, then?'

'Ho, have I tried it before!' answered August. 'But I thought now that I was going away—and I'm sure that if I had gone back there to-night—' Suddenly he became furious through and through, and asked: 'What the hell business have you got to be dragging me by the arm like that? Did I ever do it to you? Tell me, did I ever tell you to do it? Ay, but not like that. But you've never been in love with any one, so you don't know what it feels like——'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IN Polden again.

Great changes during the past two weeks.

While still on board the ship Edevart had been amazed to read his own name on the packing case on the freight deck below. He looked around and there he found several more boxes bearing his name—a whole pile of boxes, sacks and barrels and they could have been nothing else but the new goods for the store. It was like a fairy-tale and Edevart called his comrade to ask what he thought of the matter. August said: 'That must be from her!'

'From who?'

'From her that went away. These goods are from Trondhjem.'

Edevart felt in his pocket and sure enough, there was the long list of goods that Paulina had made out. It was out of the question that Lovisa Margreta had got hold of it—and besides, where would she get the money to buy goods with! The devil alone could solve this puzzling riddle!

While the purser was making out his ticket, he exclaimed upon hearing Edevart's name: 'Ho, so it's you! We've a whole mountain of goods below for you!'

Edevart was ready to answer that he knew nothing at all about the goods, but August spoke ahead of him: 'This isn't the first time that this lad here gets a whole store full of goods at a time!'

They were well treated on board and highly respected, although they had bought only deck accommodations. This fact was set down as just an eccentricity on the part of a great trader.

At the steamer landing where they disembarked for home the riddle was solved: There they observed Joakim and Teodor in Karolus' eight-oar ready to transport the goods home. And therein lay the explanation: Joakim had returned from Kvæ Fjord with a pocket full of herring money and with it had saved the store.

August too understood everything immediately, but he was not overwhelmed. When the steamer agent estimated that here must be goods to the value of ten thousand or so, August merely answered: 'Ay, he does business on a devil of a large scale there in Polden!'

The agent: 'Ho, does that mean then that Gabrielsen is due for another fall?'

August: 'Ay, there's no other way for things to go!'

Edevart did not have the nerve to take part in this conversation, he was humbled and could not conceal it. August talked to him and tried to cheer him up—on former occasions he and Edevart had returned to Polden as grand men, hadn't they? Then, they ought not to return this time as tramps. 'We'll find a way, don't you worry about that!' said August.

Joakim was somewhat embarrassed when he came to meet them. 'We were sent here to get all these cases of yours,' he said to Edevart. 'That Paulina wouldn't give us a minute's rest!'

August equal to the occasion as usual, laughed good-naturedly and asked quite guilelessly: 'How did you know it was this very day we were coming in with the goods?'

'What about the telegram that Paulina got!' answered Joakim.

Edevart was dumbfounded.

They all set out in the eight-oar. On the way home Joakim managed to tell Edevart that the old skipper from Ofoten had cleared with his sloop without settling up with the ledge people, merely promising to send the money when he arrived in the south. And there they all stood

now, those who had dried his fish for him, without a penny in their pockets and with long faces in front of their ears after the whole summer's trouble and toil.

'The fact of the matter is'—it was Teodor who had spoken up—'that if we seiners hadn't gone out and made a pile of money in Kvæ Fjord, then nothing in the whole wide world would have saved Polden!' Teodor puffed out his chest; he had earned his share and was not concealing the fact. He had bought himself a pair of sea boots with a red band around the top, and grand indeed he looked. August ignored him absolutely.

The only thing that troubled Edevart was that Joakim had had to use his money for the store rather than for the planned addition to his own cow barn, but this worry gradually wore away. He presented Paulina with the pearl ring in order that he might not be said to have returned entirely empty-handed—in God's name, something had to be done to stiffen his backbone again! Joakim pretended to notice nothing amiss; he borrowed a horse and drove the goods up from the boat-house, opened packing cases, pried open bales and rolled barrels down into the cellar, all the while teasing big brother about the high wages he would demand for his labour. Paulina filled her shelves and bins and bustled about behind the counter and made herself important.

'You're certainly stocked up,' said Edevart.

'It's that Joakim,' answered Paulina, by way of personal apology.

'What was I to do?' asked Joakim. 'She wouldn't give me a moment's rest!'

'What do you mean, I wouldn't give you any rest!'

'Now you shall hear about it, Edevart: here she lay in the middle of the floor and screamed!'

'Oh, you liar!' cried Paulina, laughing.

'Ay, she threw a fit,' continued Joakim, undisturbed.

Good-natured fun throughout, not a sour face among

them. When Joakim had finished unpacking the goods, he went straight back to his fields. He had his own philosophy: 'One to his land, the other to his trading—I wouldn't change places with you!'

There was no limit to that Joakim! Now his hay barn was bursting with hay so that he couldn't cram another pitchforkful into it, and he wouldn't be able to build this year. Ay, well! He joined forces with another and even more ambitious young man whose name was Ezra and ay, *he* had room both for the hay and for the new cow that Joakim had bought. Thus everything turned out for the best.

What about August? Was he sitting there crushed and gloomy in some corner or other and saying not a word? Far from it! After an absence of two years, Polden was again new to August. Spurred on by his desire to be active, he bustled about the village and turned up wherever he was needed. He began by helping Joakim for a time, but when he learned that Karolus had yet to do his mowing, he went over to see him, took a scythe in his hand and worked like a hired man for two days. Oh, that August, he was and always had been a remarkable character, clever and full of initiative, a liar in every sense of the word, but liked by all, loyal and helpful, often to his own detriment, but in a tight place unscrupulous to the point of crime. And back in Polden he had come; he no longer was wearing his boots with patent-leather trimmings, he was extremely shabby and had only an almost empty sailor bag for luggage. And what did all that signify? August explained it by saying that he had left all his baggage down south and had brought with him on this trip merely the things he needed most.

He wandered over to Ezra's place and made a tour of inspection. It had been August's daring imagination and advice that had developed this new place out in the wilds into the thriving farm which it now was—and which in

time was to become the marvel of the whole village. August was therefore received with open arms and with all honour and respect.

'You've done big things out here!' said August and nodded as he looked about him. 'I couldn't have done more myself in such a short length of time. What are *you* doing here, Hosea?' he asked, as though astonished to find her there.

Ezra took up the joke: 'She gets in my way out here, that's what she does!'

'I hear that you're married?'

'Ay, do you think she'd give me any mortal peace?'

Hosea interrupted: 'No, now you must keep still and wait until I tell that August exactly how it happened. I didn't want to take him, not a bit of it; but then he asked me if I'd rather he'd hang himself. Ha, ha, ha! Did you ever hear anything to beat that?'

'Ay, I'm surprised that you thought you could take each other,' said August.

He was invited into the house and made to feel at home; he found the house comfortable indeed. 'But,' said he to Ezra, 'you were a jackass not to make your house bigger in the first place. By looking at Hosea, I can tell it won't be long before there'll be more of you.'

'No,' said Ezra and shook his head innocently. 'It's only that she's so lazy that she's getting fat out here.'

Hosea pulled his hair and threatened: 'I'll teach you to call me lazy and fat!'

They climbed the slope to the potato patch; Ezra dug under the roots and showed them how large the potatoes were. 'Just look here how big this one is—half-grown already.' They went down to the bog—that great joy and blessing. The grain stalks were three feet tall and already beginning to bend; here and there they lay flat on the ground, but there was no danger as yet; they would not be ripe until harvest time.

August was amazed. He nodded and cleared his throat, but he uttered not a word. He made his way further on into the bog and stamped with both feet to see if the ground were solid—ay, solid it was. The water was rushing lustily down the enormous main ditch, and the many small side ditches had drained out the bog until the earth about them was hard and firm—out over the entire expanse now grew tiny sprouts of bushes which had already struck root here in this rich soil.

August felt respect for the hard, patient work which the place, as it stood, represented; but a traveller must of course have seen much grander things than this. 'This reminds me of a place in Australia where I was once,' he said. 'But the marsh was larger and there was more water —the main ditch was like a canal and we ran a mill with the water which flowed in it. Ay, and in the autumn, we didn't bring in the grain as grain, but milled it right there where it grew and brought it in as meal. Now maybe you are curious to know what we did with all that meal? Ay, we used it to fatten up thousands of hogs and then we sold the animals in car-load lots.'

His listeners shook their heads in speechless wonder.

August assured them that they were cultivating enough of the moor and that there was water enough in the ditches. 'From what I see here—and I can see it all at a glance—I'm dumbfounded to discover how much you have done. That's all I can say!'

The young married couple were ashamed of the tears in their eyes, but they were touched. Ezra managed to say: 'So, is that what you think! Ay, ay, we have sweated over it a bit!'

'How many cows have you?'

'Two. And one calf.'

'Ay, next year that'll make three,' said Hosea.

Ezra: 'It's this way: A woman wants to have many

cows, but a man, he wants a horse. I don't know which to get first.'

Hosea mumbled what she had perhaps mumbled hundreds of times before: 'I'll never get butter and cheese from a horse.'

August thought this over. Now it was hardly his will which guided the fish through the sea or the heavenly bodies through the void, but the Devil alone was his equal at guiding folk out of a difficulty. And Ezra must have a horse.

'How are things now?' asked August. 'Any more cries from the bog?'

'No,' replied Ezra. 'There hasn't been anything like that since the Sunday he cried out twice.'

Those two rascals, they glanced at each other ever so slightly! And there stood Hosea beside them, full of dangerous knowledge and afraid to raise her eyes.

They walked back up to the barn yard. August inspected the cow stable and barn, measured with practised hand the width of the stalls for the cows and nodded his approval; measured the barn door where the hay would be brought in and nodded, tested with his own weight the solidity of the barn floor to see if it would hold up a horse and nodded at this as well.

When he was on the point of leaving, Ezra asked uncertainly: 'What do you think of my getting a horse next year?'

'Next year? No, you can't feed three cows and a horse on the land you're working now.'

'No,' they both said.

'But,' continued August. 'A horse you must have!' And with that he walked off.

August was still eager to work and spurred others on to do likewise; Polden was still new to him and Ezra's place preyed on his mind. He went to Edevart and stated that Ezra must have a horse next year.

'Ho, so he must have a horse, must he? Well well, then he must!'

Ay. And now August and Edevart were to take their spades and break exactly enough of Ezra's marsh land to raise feed for exactly one horse. Understood?

Edevart hung back. Joakim joined them and listened to the project with interest; ay, but Edevart hung back, that sluggish lad who had already begun to grow a bit too large about the waist.

'You're not a cripple, are you?' said August. 'And you're the one who told me that you mowed a whole meadow in one night there at Doppen! That Ezra has enough money to buy seed grain with, he'll feed one cow for you, Joakim, and from that get manure enough for that new field of his; likewise, he earned enough money on the seine to buy him a horse with—isn't that so? And that same horse you'll be able to borrow here at the store to haul goods up from the boat with. Understood? Here's the spade!'

Well, well; and the two comrades pitched into the bog, a couple of madmen for work once they were at it; ay, they used strength instead of patience; they wore themselves out, but it was a marvel all they accomplished the very first day. All Ezra had to do was to go along behind them with a spade and smooth out the furrows left by those two madmen digging for all they were worth; and as for Hosea, she found herself at her stove the entire day, cooking to appease three terrific appetites. It was the most fun Ezra had yet had in that bog of his; but the most fun of all was on the following morning when Edevart screamed with pain, before he had limbered up his back.

Autumn was approaching and the comrades wandered about the village without earning a penny. Was that any kind of life for two lads such as they! Both were much

concerned. Paulina stood behind her counter selling goods; all was well as long as the herring folk had money to spend there in the village, for eventually it was sure to come to rest in the store. But what good did that do the two comrades? None at all. Edevart was obliged to be associated with Paulina's business in name at least, but he considered it something which did not in the least concern him and would say repeatedly: 'Do whatever you like—I won't stand in your way!' As for August, there too, was a man who couldn't think of accepting money for the odd jobs he performed. 'I don't need it,' he would say with pride.

But they both were in need. They had for many years gone through life independently—roof after roof had slipped from over their heads and they had moved on and found new shelters which in turn had slipped away. Here they stood now. Edevart felt his defeat most keenly: the Ofoten Skipper had sailed calmly away from Polden without even so much as paying him back that old cash loan; to the Knoffs' in Fosenland Edevart owed more money than he was worth and now on top of it all, they had come to him to get the balance on old Seaman Martinus' cow for which he had gone credit. No time for such a thing could have been more inopportune than the present. But —'Of course,' he was obliged to reply to the messenger in order to keep up appearances. 'Just wait a moment or two!' he had to say.

He hunted up August and asked his advice in the matter. 'You must simply take the messenger over to the store,' advised August; 'and make out a note!' What, write a note on his own store? But write he did; he wrote out a kind of a receipt from himself: Received from the store in cash and merchandise such and such a sum, Edevart Andreassen.

If any more were to fall upon him now, he would be unable to stand up under it.

'You look glum,' said August.

'I'd like to sink through the earth,' said Edevart. He continued to brood; at length he said to August: 'I could begin peddling again, start out again with my sack, but I don't know how I can leave here. I haven't any goods.'

August replied: 'I've been thinking of the same thing. As for goods, you can just take your old cloth and odds and ends and fit us both out.'

Edevart hesitated to plunder the store any further and said: 'But we haven't any money, either.'

'Money?'

'Change money, we can't start out with empty pockets. If a woman comes out and hands us a bill, we can't just stand there, can we? We must have some small change.'

'There must be some way to get hold of that,' answered August.

Well, well, and so August had nothing against starting out again as a pedlar. No, far from it; he had been thinking of it himself, the occupation again appealed to him as something new; the gipsy life was calling. . . .

The following day he said to Edevart: 'And now it seems that that circus-clown Teodor also wants to buy him a gold ring.'

'You don't say so!'

'He mentioned it to me.'

Edevart, amazed: 'But you haven't a gold ring, have you?'

'Oh, yes, I have,' answered August. 'You probably won't understand it, for you aren't very sharp with your wits and never have been. But I'll get us change money if only you'll help me to-night.'

Edevart scented evil deeds and robbery and shook his head.

'You needn't think that we're going to steal the ring,' said August. 'And all you'll have to do anyway is to stand

and look up and down the road and tell me if any one's coming.'

'I don't know if I dare be with you,' said Edevart, beset by doubts.

'Ho, so you'd rather rot here in Polden?'

It was night and pitch dark when they set out. August carried a spade and a hatchet which belonged to the store for the purpose of opening packing cases. Edevart silently walked along at his side.

They walked inland along the road in the direction of the church, August slightly in the lead, eager and filled with a fixed purpose; carefully he skirted each farm they approached.

'Where are we going?' asked Edevart.

'We mustn't talk,' answered August.

They continued to walk for something like an hour, traversed the entire inner parish, farm after farm, entered the parsonage woods, passed through them and kept on across the parsonage fields. Reaching the gate of the cemetery, August halted and said softly: 'You stand right here! If any one comes, all you have to do is run into the graveyard after me. Nobody will dare follow you in there. But you must run as fast as you can and jump right over the graves.'

Sacrilege, thought Edevart; August had it in mind to break into the church. But then why had he brought a spade along? He said: 'I'm afraid you're thinking of breaking into the church.'

'Don't be a fool!' said August. 'The church is safe as far as I'm concerned!'

'Ay, but what are you thinking of? Can't I ask?'

August, curtly: 'Shut up! I know where his grave is; I'll just take off the sod and lay it back on again.'

'Are you going to open a grave?'

'Exactly. He's buried there with my gold ring on his finger, a thick gold ring—I gave three dollars for it.

I know which hand and which finger it's on, so I won't have to paw around.'

Edevart shuddered and whispered: 'Don't you do it, August!'

'Will you hold your tongue and stand here!' snarled August and left him.

The night was dark; Edevart could see very little, but he listened and heard August digging in the ground—outside of that, not a sound to be heard. At first he was extremely nervous and trembled each time he thought he heard some one coming. Here he was, party to a sinful enterprise and helping to disturb the peace of the grave. But after fifteen minutes had passed, then a half hour, then a full hour, he found he could breathe more freely and even sat down for a while there by the gate. He spied through the darkness something even blacker—the mound of earth which August was piling up. Time passed and at length he heard a creaking noise—that must have been the spikes letting go their hold as August pried open the lid of the coffin. Edevart, tense with excitement, jumped up from the ground and stood still.

Neither of the comrades ever forgot that night, although nothing disastrous befell them. But they both knew that they were treading the path of godlessness and even August who had displayed such bold courage, spent many a sleepless night for a long time after. Naturally he had had no previous experience in robbing a grave and was excited. He knew that he would have to work rapidly and silently—no loud talking which might rattle the windows of the church—why, he couldn't even swear aloud if he were to scratch himself on the end of a spike; he had to exercise his will power, and ignore his comrade's objections.

All was not accomplished with the opening of the coffin's lid; he had yet to find the ring there in the darkness of night, and that was the most difficult thing of all.

August could have located the hand and the finger blindfold, if only the corpse had been fresh; but here was a different situation: the coffin contained no more than rags and bones, and furthermore, in the course of its long ride from Polden, the corpse had been turned full around. What the devil had become of the hands? He confined his search to the centre of the corpse. No. . . .

It took an eternity to search; Edevart, unable to endure further waiting, abandoned his post and came into the graveyard. August had raised but one end of the coffin lid and had propped this open by standing his spade inside. He was groping with one arm in the coffin.

Edevart whispered down into the grave: 'Come on now, August, we must go!'

August stood up, excited and desperate. 'Get out of here, will you!' he hissed. 'Go on back where you belong before the devil gets after you!'

'I'll give you my ring to sell instead.'

'Your ring, eh? Is the sexton to find my ring then and keep it? Hold that jaw of yours!'

Edevart was obliged to turn back and August again began to fumble around inside the coffin. He perceived that it would no longer do simply to grope here and there at random, he would have to begin at one end and cover the entire interior inch by inch—a loathsome task. He had to pinch everything that came between his fingers, and now and then something nasty that stuck to his hand. The buttons fooled him often for these were small and round; the corpse lay in the coffin fully dressed and so there were many buttons, coat buttons and pants buttons. August kept on. When at length he came across the ring, he could not refrain from whispering aloud to his comrade: 'I've got it!' And with that Edevart heard him begin struggling with the lid in an effort to get it back on the coffin; again a creaking of spikes.

And naturally this part of August's work was poor and

inaccurate, he was unable to find the old nail holes and he did not dare to pound; therefore, he pushed down the lid, stood on it and stealthily trod it down with his feet. After that Edevart heard him throwing the earth back into the grave, pausing occasionally to tramp on it in order to pack it down hard.

The most important task of all was still left for him to perform: that of covering up his trail. Edevart heard him fussing around the grave, clawing the earth and patting it down with his hands; at length he laid back the sod—he struggled long at this work, for it was important that the cracks should be as inconspicuous as possible.

At length August came. 'Feel of this!' said he.

Edevart felt. It was the ring. Edevart said: 'Let me carry the spade and the hatchet!'

They walked silently back through the parsonage woods. It began to rain.

Ay, the autumn rain had begun to fall; it lasted for three days and August considered this an omen of good luck—indeed, an act of Providence: that blessed rain would prevent folk from entering the cemetery, and would wash out the cracks in the sod above the plundered grave and would also soak the scattered lumps of earth down into the roots of the grass. That rain was a fortunate climax to the expedition.

And then began another period of wandering about with sacks of goods on their backs; it was October, the season when folk were digging up their harvest of potatoes; the dark autumn days were approaching. August wanted to wander southward along the coast and Edevart suspected that his ultimate goal was Fosenland where lived the grand lady he was in love with; but if such were the case, Edevart cared little—if only he wouldn't go so far as to shoot her husband as he had threatened to do! He said: 'I'm leaving it to you to sell out your goods be-

fore long and to stop in at the nearest town to fill up your bag again!'

'Don't you worry about me!' August answered.

They parted company. They did not meet again until the following summer when they came together at the Stokmarknes Fair.

Edevart sailed in his four-oar northward straight into Kvæ Fjord before he began to sell. He was hoping that in those parts there would still be in circulation some of the money which had come there the previous summer at the time of the herring strike.

Keen competition developed between the store in Polden and Gabrielsen's store out in the country; one of them would eventually have to close up. Gabrielsen must have been powerful indeed by reason of the security offered by his wife's kinsfolk; it was not to be expected that Paulina could hold out long against him; but she was a shrewd person and knew what she was about, figured closely on exactly what folk would be most in need of during the various seasons of the year and laid in her stock accordingly. This was cleverly planned; she did not buy coal oil when summer was approaching with its midnight sun, nor tobacco at the coming of winter when the men folk would be setting out for Lofoten—she proceeded with caution and intelligence.

Joakim saw that the business was going well, and, since he had once before taken an interest in the store, ambition began to stir within him, the ambition to hold out against Gabrielsen. He proceeded conservatively and never allowed his purchases to exceed his cash in hand; together they took care of the ordering—Sister Paulina would bring him her list and Joakim would write a confident letter to go with it; the merchants in Trondhjem could do as they felt inclined: sell at the buyer's price and terms or disregard the order.

Sister Paulina had developed into a very clever girl. As a storekeeper she was careful not to overdo the matter of being agreeable; folk could not count too greatly upon her generosity when they brought their troubles to her—no, she was not the kind-hearted person Edevart had been there behind the counter. Edevart had given his goods away whenever he felt the occasion warranted it; but Paulina held on to hers, weighed her goods, reckoned closely and ran things in a business-like way. And if an account remained unpaid for some time, she did not hesitate to bring it to the attention of the debtor. Some customers of course became disgruntled at all this and threatened never again to set foot in her store. And ay, they might stay away for a time at least, but they always came back, for what else was there for them to do? They could trade with Gabrielsen, but he was even worse, and upbraided the Poldeners because they dared to support a store in their own village. It was simply in order to ruin him, he said, and he had no desire to do business with people of that kind, and they never had any money anyway; ay, they could keep away from him, if you please, and in the end he would show them that he could crush that upstart store of theirs down in Polden.

Gabrielsen was embittered by the fact that it was taking so long for Paulina and her brother in Polden to go bankrupt, but was there any sense in his pitching into his customers like that and, so to say, showing them the door? The result was that Gabrielsen's own business began to go downhill and the end was soon in sight for him. The whole thing was demoralizing for the man himself; sheer indifference caused him to give up wearing that white shirt-front about his neck, and now he shaved only once a week, —on Sundays. What kind of a business man was he? Consider Paulina, on the other hand, how was she? She was a neat girl who was daily growing up to be more and more of a lady. She always wore a white scarf about her

neck and a pearl ring on her finger; and when she went to church she wore a gold locket which had cost a good many dollars—a present she had once received from big brother. But Paulina would not have appeared in all this finery had she been unable to afford it. The devil! But hadn't those children of the telegraph inspector come into power and money! And folk had it on good authority, too, that this family had meat for dinner every Sunday.

There stood the store in Polden; as for Paulina, herself, it certainly could not be said that she shed tears of pity each time a woman came to her in want and distress and asked for a half pound of coffee, for she did not; but that she was an honest and a worthy person could not be denied. She thought nothing at all of a couple of raisins when the village children came into the store, and how about this: wasn't she still helping Seaman Martinus' family even after paying the balance due on that cow of theirs in accordance with Edevart's note?

And then the devil himself must have got into that Gabrielsen; he called for a showdown, staked everything on the turn of one card. He purchased goods in quantities, in mountains; goods of the most unbelievable kind and variety, ordinary and elegant, even heavy things such as grindstones and round iron heating stoves of American design. Oh, yes, Gabrielsen could buy in a stock! But he must have seen as clearly as any one that he would be unable to sell all these goods—it was a desperate play, he wished to show his power. Good. There was an eager rush to his store just as he had expected; he raked the parish clean of ready money and the store in Polden stood empty for many weeks. But did Paulina and Joakim tire of the contest and close their doors? On the contrary. Gabrielsen for his part did a brilliant business; he had goods which even the plutocrats of the parish and the neighbouring districts came to purchase, silk and velvet dressgoods and ladies' hats and watch chains, store boots

and incomparable tablecloths with fringes and prayer-books with gilt edges—why should people write south to the cities after such goods when they could just as well buy them from Gabrielsen? And in addition to all this, Gabrielsen had once more bought fancy foods and delicacies—cheeses and honey and fruit which the plutocrats were unable to pass by without buying. There was only one *real* storekeeper and that was Gabrielsen!

And so it went for a time that winter, and Paulina became more and more disgruntled. She still decked herself out with a white ribbon about her throat and a pearl ring on her finger, but there was no one to admire her finery; outside of her housework, she had nothing to do, for the store had no customers. Joakim went about his own affairs, tended his grain and his potatoes; later was busy with his threshing and when the time came, set out for Lofoten as one of Karolus' crew. Paulina was left alone with her troubles. Since she had sold nothing, she had no cash with which to purchase new goods and her business was perishing automatically.

And now it happens that Edevart, off wandering somewhere, sends her a money letter; not much money, just a few dollars, a couple of ten-dollar notes, but it restores Paulina's courage. Oh, that big brother of hers, he was trying first of all to settle his own account, his draft upon the store—the amount that was left over was for Paulina to do with as she liked. Ay, that big brother of hers, he was always trying to belittle his own actions, for that's the kind of a person he was. And now there could be no doubt but that he needed the money himself and Paulina was certain too that Joakim would be furious and would refuse to accept these ten-dollar bills; she bought goods with them none the less. The rumour soon spread that the store in Polden had merchandise again—no such enormous quantity of goods as had been brought in by Gabrielsen, but necessary goods, things that folk

had actual need of, a few sacks of flour, groats, coffee, American lard. Paulina answered Edevart's letter and thanked him for the money and assured him that it had not been wasted. 'Times are not good,' she wrote. 'And it is rumoured here in the parish that a certain storekeeper has been having a deal of difficulty lately settling up his bills. He was here in Polden recently and talked with me, but I have nothing to say about that. You must come home now, Edevart, and take care of your business yourself; you are away and Joakim is away and I have no one to give me advice. I can only do as this stupid head of mine tells me. . . .'

And so in the middle of February, when the weather was coldest and the snow deepest—Outer Polden folk came back from church with the news that Gabrielsen's store had been closed for the second time. Gabrielsen had drained his wife's kinsfolk to the very dregs; they could stretch their resources no further, and now the last and heaviest of the notes had fallen due. That was the end.

It must be said that Gabrielsen had done all that was humanly possible to save himself, had gone to see the parson, the doctor and the sheriff to ask for their endorsements—he had not even neglected Sexton Johnsen who, although flattered by the request, was obliged to decline like the others. As a last resort, Gabrielsen had come to Paulina and had offered to sell her goods at rock-bottom prices for cash. What kind of goods? Paulina must have wondered—grindstones and round heating stoves? But she talked intelligently with him about the business and did not assume a hostile attitude and rudely show him the door. Gabrielsen mentioned one grand and expensive thing after another which he was willing to let go for any price she might offer him. 'I have no money for those,' said Paulina. He enumerated the necessities he had on hand. 'I have just laid in a stock of those,' said Paulina.

No; no bargain was struck.

A hard winter and hard times still ahead for folk, but the days began to grow longer and brighter and then at length in March, Joakim returned from Lofoten for a holiday and brought something with him—ay, money for the whole of Polden. What's that? Ledge money which ought to have been paid them last summer! The Ofoten Skipper had paid! Joakim was to divide it among the workers according to the amount that each had earned. What a stroke of luck! Money there was for children and grown folk, a blessed shower of gold descended upon almost every home in the village—no great sums, to be sure, but enough to make for prosperous times—a golden era in comparison to the period just passed. The store got back all the money it had had outstanding and once again had ready cash; the Skipper even paid back the old debt he owed to Edevart.

What, had the Skipper turned honest all at once? Why no, he had been honest right along, of course! A grand old man he was, but his life had not been an easy one; that son of his, Pedlar Nils, had drawn too heavily upon his means, God knows, and perhaps he no longer had a great deal left. But then, too, the old Skipper must have realized that he would be unable to return to Polden with another cargo of fish to be dried without first settling up for the previous year's labour—h'm, perhaps he had been forced into being honest by sheer necessity. But so well had he done by the Poldeners, that they almost blessed his name for having postponed the settlement until this time when their want made them appreciate it most keenly.

Edevart came home late that spring when all was turning green and beautiful. His four-oar was loaded down with goods and it seemed that he had cash enough to get himself out of any difficulty. What a talent that man had for selling things! He had wandered far up into Finmark with his peddling business, sold goods to longshore-

men on the islands north of Tromsø, to Lapps and settlers in the region of Kvæ Fjord, sold woollen coats and oilskins to folk who had never intended to purchase anything.

Paulina joyfully contemplated the goods she would get from the cargo of the four-oar.

'You can't have them,' said Edevart. 'I'm taking them down to the fair.'

The idea had been August's; ever with a head for speculation on his shoulders, he had sent word from Fosenland that he had purchased goods from the Knoffs' and had already rented a booth for the fair at Stokmarknes. Since August detested letter writing, he communicated his idea to his comrade this time by telegram and advised him to come himself in the four-oar, loading it up with as many goods as possible in order that their booth at the fair might be one of the most impressive. August himself would go by steamer, bringing with him many bales and boxes.

August was as sure as could be that it would be a grand stroke of business for them.

One day Edevart said to his brother: 'We ought to settle up with each other, but I imagine it will be a little easier for me after the fair.'

Joakim, on the defensive at once: 'What is there for us to settle up?'

'For all those goods you bought for the store last autumn.'

'I got my money for those,' said Joakim.

'Ho, you did, did you? Then it must have fallen on your head from the sky!'

'I got it all right. That's what I used to buy building materials with for my cow barn.'

'No, it was your Lofoten wages you bought materials with.'

'You'll hear if I did! Paulina!' cried Joakim through the open door.

'You're a jackass!' said Edevart.

With that Joakim's wrath arose and serious trouble might have resulted if strangers had been there to listen, instead of just their aged father sitting inside the house where he tried his best to understand the disagreement which had come between the lads—it seemed that both were right. 'What are you quarrelling about?' he asked.

Edevart: 'It's just that Joakim, he's acting silly again.'

'I don't see how Joakim is acting silly,' their father said. 'You boys both have good talents you should thank the Lord for.'

Paulina arrived on the scene. She looked first at one and then at the other and asked: 'What's the matter?'

'It's that Joakim——"

'Didn't I get money from you to buy building materials with?' asked Joakim.

'Ay.'

'Ho, you're on his side! You have it fixed up between you!' fumed Edevart.

Paulina: 'Why must there always be so much nonsense between you each time you settle up! If neither one of you wants to take money from the other, then simply give it to me. It won't be wasted, for I'll make good use of it.'

Joakim mutters: 'That fool, he thinks he owes me for goods.'

'I know I do!'

Paulina: 'But Lord bless you, Edevart, didn't you send money home when you were up north?'

'That was nothing.'

'It was what you thought you owed the store and many times more than that.'

Edevart wildly tears his hair: 'I can't understand how you figure. I thought I could add two and two together.'

'But you can't,' said Joakim. 'All you know is what you see in front of your eyes. You'll never get the right answer that way.'

'Listen to that young whelp, Paulina!'

'Wasn't it you that built the store?' asked Joakim.

Edevart glared.

Their father leaned from his corner and said: 'Ay. that's right!'

'And didn't the seine come from you?'

When Edevart regained control of himself, he growled contemptuously: 'The seine? Heh, I didn't give a pin for that seine. No. It was poorly made in the first place and in the second place it was rotten; that Knoff, he was ready to throw it into the sea, he was!'

'It held herring for me all right!'

'Herring for you! Year after year you've gone out with it and scratched around in all the herring bays and eaten up your food and made yourself poor. Ay. And then when at last you make a strike, you think that that seine has done you a lot of good, but it hasn't!'

Joakim, excited: 'You—is it you that's talking about scratching around year after year? Haven't you a bit of shame left in you? Isn't it you who have been scratching around the country from one end of it to the other without staying in one place?'

Edevart could make no headway in that direction and had to change his course: 'Ho, you can talk all you want to about my travelling around and about all the things I have to attend to! But is it so much better to stay right here in Polden and rot as you and that Ezra are doing?'

'That Ezra—are you crazy!' screamed Joakim. 'Do you know that that Ezra will in time be the owner of

the biggest farm in Polden? Maybe you don't know that, but I know it!'

'Ay, after he's worn himself all out working on his farm—after he's no longer able to either walk on his legs or creep on his hands and knees on his own land!'

'What's that!—shouldn't he work?'

'And after he's worn out that Hosea and made her a slave to her land and her cattle,' continued Edevart. 'It's pitiful to look at her!'

'You fool!' mumbled Joakim. 'Can't you see how pleased and happy they are over that new place of theirs?'

Edevart remembered the answer to this question: 'That's because they don't know about anything better,' he said.

'What is there better? They have their troubles to worry about, but they like what they're doing and don't ask for anything else.'

'But in spite of their work, all they can do is live from hand to mouth. That's all they can do!'

'No, in the first place, that isn't all: they began with empty hands, and now they have a house and home, they have land, they have three head of cattle, soon they'll be having a horse.'

'Jabber away, jabber away!' sneered Edevart.

'And besides that, they know what peace of mind is, and that's more than you do. When they go to bed, they sleep.'

'I suppose they do,' said Edevart.

'Ay, but that's something you can't do, you who wander all over the country and think your way is so much better. I've heard you nights enough! You twist around like a worm before you go to sleep and when you finally get to snoring, you start yelling something or other about a waterfall and about August and about Florida in America and about that farm of yours. That's

the way you get your rest at night! I wouldn't want to change places with you!'

Long silence. Then their old father says: 'That Edevart, he has so many things to think about. You mustn't plague him, he has so much on his mind!'

'The fact is,' said Edevart at length, 'that I owe you for those goods.'

'I can't be bothered listening to you!'

Edevart: 'But now I want you to take the whole store and do with it what you like. That's only right.'

'Who, me? The store?' said Joakim. 'Oh, no thanks. You'll have to excuse me there, I'm no business man. It's that Paulina who runs the store. I've enough important work of my own. And now first of all, I'm going to build me a decent cow barn.'

The father continues to feel that each of his sons is right in certain respects, and now once again he raises his voice in conciliation. 'Ay,' he says. 'Grand indeed are the things that that Joakim grows in the earth, and now he must build him a larger cow barn. If only it could have been while your mother was still alive!'

Edevart was getting nowhere. He took out his wallet, laid twenty-five dollars on the table and said: 'Look here, take this for the store for the time being; you shall have more after the fair!'

'No!' said Paulina, startled out of her wits. 'Don't do it!'

'He's crazy!' said Joakim, butting in.

Edevart bit his lip and nodded. A sudden idea came to him and he said: 'Ay, then I've nothing else to think but that you two want to get rid of me and own the store together without me.'

And now it was Joakim's turn to glare. Paulina threw up her hands and let them fall to her sides; she was speechless. Joakim said nothing further, either; he stamped over to the door, lifted the latch and pushed

against it, hard. He wanted to go out, to go out quickly, and pushed with his full weight against the door—and forgot that the door opened inward. And this particular door was one he had entered a thousand times!

After he had left the house, Paulina said: 'You can't mean that, Edevart!'

Edevart realized perfectly that he had gone too far and he answered in a low voice: 'No, no, now that you say it. Soon I won't be knowing at all what I'm talking about.'

'You must leave Edevart in peace!' called the old man loudly. 'He has so much on his mind!'

The matter ended with that; these fatherly words went straight to his heart and Edevart softened; his annoyance subsided and he turned away to hide his embarrassment.

Before he left, Paulina said: 'You must take back this money of yours, Edevart. You simply can't be without money in your pocket when you go to the fair.'

And naturally, calm was restored again; no harm had been intended on either side. But wisely indeed had Joakim acted—it had been an act of wisdom to leave the house when he had, for otherwise he would surely have picked up a chair or anything else that was handy and hurled it at his brother's head.

Edevart would have to have a man with him in the boat when he set out for the fair. He had, during the past winter, sailed many a hard stretch of sea up there off Northern Norway, but his boat had never been so heavily freighted then, and Vestfjorden which he was to cross would always be a problem—of that fact he had had ample experience. He spoke to Karolus and asked him to come along, but no, Karolus declined to go to the fair. Not that Head-man Karolus was so tremendously occupied with official business just at that time; it was just that he had received a hint from the parson that his

wife, Ane Maria, might perhaps be released from prison before so very long. 'I have good news to report to you, Karolus,' the parson had said to him the Sunday before. 'There is nothing definite or certain about it yet, but they are trying to arrange things so that your wife may come back home to you!' Ay, and that was a good piece of news to hear and it had almost taken Karolus' breath away. He gave himself up to meditation and on his return from church, did not touch a morsel of food. From then on he continued to eat sparingly, because of the profound meditations in which his mind was absorbed, and when later, Edevart asked him to make the voyage with him to the fair, he shook his head and declined decisively. He was in no mood for pleasure, he said; such was reserved for unmarried folk. 'You must take Teodor or Ezra with you!' he said.

Edevart objected that they were both married men too, but Karolus said that ay, married they were of course, but they had no cross to bear!

Edevart did not understand a word of all this.

And of course he did not get Ezra to go with him, either; in fact, he did not even mention the matter to him, for Ezra was too busy these days with the harvests he was reaping on that moor of his; then, too, before he could get a horse to plough with, there was that new little strip to be ditched and drained. Ay, that enormous bog of his awaited him with an endless amount of work.

Teodor was the last man Edevart wanted to have with him on the trip, yet it was inevitable that he should be the one; he even came himself, and asked for a place in the boat—he was, it seemed, so anxious to go to the fair to buy one thing or another! Teodor shuffled about the village and never found anything to do; shabby and slovenly he was—if he happened to lose a button, he would simply put a small stick of wood in its place. Oh, but when it came to his legs, he was grand; he wore

those boots of his with red bands around the top! And now to-day he walks around bragging about the profits from the herring seine he and the others made last year with which they saved Polden from death and starvation. He put up a bold front although his pockets were empty —ah, but he had a gold ring on his finger! The materials to make a man were all there, but he had never put them together.

Oh, that married pair, Teodor and Ragna, both born in Polden, both reared in poverty, both lazy, dishonest and poor, but by no means stupid. Short of brains and ability? No, they were quick and clever in their way and Ragna had stood at the head of her class in school. They could filch and cheat as quickly as any one, and they were absolutely brilliant when it came to covering up their tracks; but in such activities they used up what brain power they had. Their home was a hovel to enter and they added a child to their litter every other year; but, whether it was simply because things could not possibly have been worse with them, they still could laugh and joke, just like other folk; and Ragna, with that curving mouth of hers, was prettier than any other girl when she laughed. Their condition was anything but grand, 'tis true; but they knew of nothing better and, thanks to that, the days passed and life was endurable for them, and they were free from actual unhappiness. They got along.

When it was decided that Teodor was to accompany Edevart to the fair, it turned out that Ragna wanted to go along, too.

'What will you do for clothes?' asked Teodor. 'Do you want to go travelling around just as you are?'

'No,' she said and was obliged to give in.

Oh, but they were both equally carefree, equally greedy for pleasure. However, the boat could not carry an additional passenger, considering the size of her

cargo. And besides, who would look after those children of hers? 'But you shall have goods for a new dress from the fair,' promised Edevart.

'Oh, if you would be so good as that!' she cried. 'Then I would be able to go to church again with other folk.'

Poor Ragna, she was patient enough in her poverty. She might have worn Sunday clothes every day of the week, had she been born to a life of ease. And then, instead of having everyone look down upon her because of her petty follies, she might have made some preacher feel honoured by her coming to church to hear him.

Edevart never forgot how once upon a time when they both were children, he had helped her to hunt in the snow for a shiny button. There had been a crown on it, a prize for her. Emotion still stirred within him whenever he saw her—but he no longer regarded her boldly; instead, he now pitied her. She had marvellously beautiful hands, for the reason that she was a slattern and seldom used them. What was she to do to better her own condition? Disgrace had closed over her, and she had become lazy watching the cloud press down. Teodor could say to his wife: 'When you were down in that cellar of Karolus' last night after potatoes, you could just as well have taken enough to last us out the week, couldn't you?' And Ragna could answer her husband: 'Ay, we both ought to do better than we are doing!'

CHAPTER NINETEEN

YEAR after year they gather here at the fair—as though they could miss the fun! Here are young girls with shawls and bright kerchiefs about their heads and others who, considering themselves the daughters of grander men, have begun to appear, a bit furtively, in hats. Here comes that gay dog, Henrik Sten who, arriving alone in his sailboat, makes fast his craft, brushes off his shoes and steps ashore; and there comes Eide Nikolaisen, the blacksmith who learned his trade in Tromsø, strolling up and down the waterfront—he is the owner of a hair chain with a gold clasp, is a great brawler and seducer of girls, dark of skin like all blacksmiths, and famous for the strength of arm with which, during a dance, he would lift his girl from the floor. And here, too, are older and more sedate folk, women who have saved up dairy products to sell and men who have come to buy themselves a boat. But the place is still rather dull, few folk have arrived—no sound of an accordion yet, no noise and bustle.

August is one of the first to appear on the scene; he has taken over the booth, arranged his wares neatly on the shelves and swept the floor clean of débris. But, since folk are still few and far between, that restless soul, bored to death, had closed his booth and gone off on a spree. The sailor lad on shore-leave!

He was on the lookout for Edevart and met him when he arrived. But when Edevart saw August standing there, he became alarmed and suspected that things had not gone too well with his comrade, for if August had

been carrying a full wallet, he would hardly have permitted himself 'shore-leave.'

Together they unloaded the four-oar and carried the goods up to the booth. 'Ay, these are my goods,' said August, pointing to the shelves. 'Not quite as much as I thought!' No, there wasn't so much there, after all—a few yards of dressgoods, sewing things, buttons and hooks, thread, woollen shawls and kerchiefs—it was lucky that Edevart had come with a four-oar loaded to the gunwales, for August had hardly anything.

They arranged what they had on the shelves, filling the gaps with empty boxes and, thanks to that, in the end their place lost its barren appearance and August said encouragingly: 'I wish I owned this booth of yours just as it stands!'

'You own your share of it,' answered Edevart.

August, indifferently: 'Oh, well, we can talk about that later on. What's become of that Teodor—has he gone? Well, that's a good thing, the less I have to do with him, the better I'm pleased. Let's see, there was something I wanted to tell you: Mattea is here!'

'Who's that? Ho, Mattea!'

'They have a concession. Shall we go there? They're running an eating place, she and that husband of hers.'

'Have you seen her to talk to?' asked Edevart.

'Ay. But I'm not mad at her; I never quarrel with women, not even when they run off with my ring and my gold watch. You don't by any chance have any money with you, do you?'

'I'm not penniless.'

'Then let me have a couple of dollars. To change the subject, that Knoff intends to build him a mill by that waterfall of yours.'

'What—will anything come of it?'

'They went over and had a look at the place, the old Chief and Romeo; I rowed them over. Ay, something will

come of it. "And you, August, what do you think about it?" they said to me, for they knew I've put up mills in foreign countries where I've been. Then I explained the whole thing to them—one turbine—power free gratis—wheat from Russia. They nodded their heads and said: "Ay." And I said, "Edevart Andreassen will be the miller and manage the whole place." And again they nodded their heads. Look, here's Mattea's place.'

A good-sized booth it was, with several tables surrounded by stools; the same booth where Mattea had been waiting on the table that time she became engaged to Nils. After many changes of occupation, the couple had finally become restaurant keepers; apparently they had given up their work on the farm in Ofoten.

August made himself at home and asked for his bottle. 'This is that comrade of mine,' said he. 'You recognize him, don't you?'

Oh, yes, Mattea had recognized him all right.

'So we meet here again,' said Edevart.

'Looks like it,' she replied, curtly.

Edevart, with a smile: 'I see the mark is still there on the ceiling where somebody once threw a stool!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed August with boisterous good humour.

Mattea did not laugh, she glared furiously at Edevart and reminded him at once of the time he had sent her husband a sharp request for money. 'You ought to be ashamed to have sent such a letter,' she said.

Edevart, calmly and soothingly: 'So, was it as bad as all that? I didn't read it myself.'

'You didn't read it?'

'Some one else wrote it for me, a big trader in Fosenland.'

Mattea, more gently: 'I'd like to lay my hands on that trader!'

'Ay,' laughed Edevart. 'But he would only have taken

you in his arms and kissed you, for it's a young and handsome lad he is.'

'Oh, I can see you haven't changed a bit!' she mumbled. 'But did you get the money all right? Why didn't you write and let us know?'

'That you must forgive me—I'm not much good at writing.'

And thus they made up. None of them were of a mind to bear a lifelong grudge.

'How is that throat of yours?' joked Edevart.

'Throat? Oh, so you still remember it? Oh, yes, I got over it!' And now, if that Mattea didn't wink roguishly at him!

Nils came in from the kitchen, Pedlar Nils, the same lad who several years ago had let nothing worry him but had passed his troubles on to his father. Did he know that his poor old father, the skipper, hadn't had money enough to buy a full cargo of fish at Lofoten this year and now lay up in Polden with no more than three-fourths of a cargo drying on the ledges? It seemed that Nils was now occupied in the kitchen and that it was he who prepared the hot and cold dishes which his wife served to the guests; at least that's the way it seemed, for he was wearing some kind of an apron. He, too, remembered that sharp collection letter Edevart had written him from Fosenland and announced that he didn't care to have such customers as Edevart in the place. But Mattea stopped him with a short explanation treating him rather uppishly. In the end Nils mumbled: 'Just as though I wasn't good for that money!'

Both of the lads ordered food and beer to drink with it; August took a drink or two of something stronger and called to Nils to come and have a glass with him. But Mattea protested at this and said that Nils had other things to attend to, that he was to go back to the kitchen.

'I've cooked the roast,' said Nils.

'Then you can chop some wood,' she answered.

No help for that, Mattea was the same manager she had always been, though just as young and handsome as he,—ay, a good-looking couple,—and Nils had to obey and go.

'Come on over and sit down with us, Mattea!' said August.

She came, but took the seat next to Edevart. August drank *brændevin*. 'Haven't you any children?' asked Edevart.

Mattea: 'Haven't I any children—what a question! I have two children but they're with their grandparents. The old folk don't want to part with them—oh, well, they're rich enough to keep them. Children? That's one thing you can rely on!'

August: 'Well, they're not mine.'

'Yours!' cried Mattea and burst into laughter.

'What are you laughing at? Doesn't it make you feel kind of funny when you stop to think that you used to be my old sweetheart and that now you're another man's wife and all that?'

'I'm not thinking about that at all,' said Mattea.

'H'm, you're not thinking about that? No, I don't suppose you are,' nodded August gloomily. 'But what if I'm thinking about it? Here I am so you can look at me, and I'm nothing very grand after all, I haven't any money or jewels; no, I'm nothing to attract your eye—'

Edevart: 'Keep quiet, August, haven't you a tremendous lot of store goods in that booth of ours?'

'Let it go at that,' said August. 'But you Mattea, you were my sweetheart once. And I kissed you then, too.'

'Did you? I don't remember a thing about it!' But now Mattea was worried for fear that, in teasing her old friend, she had gone too far. He was drunk and might fly off the handle; she said: 'If we must talk about it,

then you must remember that now I'm married to Nils; he is my husband and that you can't deny. But after him there's no one I like as much as you, August, and that you can always be sure of.'

August looked at Edevart triumphantly as though to say: 'Did you hear that!' The good-natured sailor was satisfied; he emptied another glass and ordered some coffee. 'Ay, ay, no use talking about that any more,' he said. 'The fact is, I have my sweetheart right there where I ought to have her and you needn't be doubting my word. But she is such a grand lady that I don't even want to mention her name. And you ought to see her when she comes in a hat and grand clothes to get me to take her out for a walk. Ay, Edevart, you know her, don't you?'

Edevart nodded.

Could it be that Mattea was getting jealous? 'You ordered coffee,' said she and got up. And now came a grand surprise: Mattea returned from the kitchen with a hat on her head! See, Mattea, too, had begun to go about in a hat just like those other daughters of the grander men; ay, for her husband was a skipper's son and she had to prove to her two friends that she wasn't such a nobody after all. She set down the coffee tray with long fingers and remained standing.

'Are you going out?' asked Edevart.

She found an excuse at once: 'Ay, let's go out and take a walk to see how many new folk have come.'

The comrades drank their coffee, paid for it and went out with her. They strolled about, making a complete circuit of the place. A few more boats had arrived bringing new fair-customers; but still there was no life to speak of as yet. They walked up to the merry-go-round which was just being set up, to the big tent where the circus was to be, then to a smaller tent where two acrobat-jugglers were practising their knife-throwing act. 'Let's go and see that booth of ours,' suggested August.

Mattea was filled with respect for their booth and all their shelves of goods. The comrades enjoyed her comments hugely and August began to boast in a loud voice: 'If you should hear of any one who wants to buy goods where they can get a good bargain, just send them over to us, Mattea, for we have all kinds of things and there isn't a merchant in the whole city of Trondhjem who can undersell us.'

Mattea promised to recommend them and said that she, too, would come and make a large purchase from them before they set out for home.

They returned to Mattea's booth. A few customers had already collected and had been served with bread and coffee. Nils, now relieved from waiting on tables, disappeared into the kitchen again. August drank and became more and more loquacious; he had found an audience and his imagination began to soar. To be sure, he pretended to be talking to Edevart alone, but he constantly glanced to right and to left, and talked in such a loud voice that everyone was certain to hear him. Ay, now he was in his element.

'You remember that scarf of mine,' he said. 'Well, I was offered big money for that just before I left the south.'

'And you didn't sell it?' asked Edevart.

'Me! I should say not! Any child could figure out that if they offered me four hundred for it, it was worth at least eight. Furthermore I didn't feel like bargaining with them, I had other matters on my mind at the time —nights I had to look out for that Magnus when he was at the pier despatching ships. Ay, that's a fact; you probably don't know what I'm talking about, but anyway, in the end, I happened to despatch that Magnus.'

'You despatched him?'

'Don't you believe me?'

'What did you do to him?'

'What was I to do to him, that miserable little snake? I killed him.'

'Oh, nonsense! You're not trying to say you shot him?'

'Exactly,' said August.

Edevart: 'No! You wouldn't be sitting here with me if you had!'

'Is that so! I wouldn't be sitting here, eh? But was I to let that jackass go around and tell the whole district that I was afraid of the water? Here I've been around the world, and have possessions in many lands; ay, here I sit, so be so good as to come and arrest me! No, they didn't dare to do that. Do you remember him clearly, that store clerk, Magnus? I don't see how you could, for he was a regular zero, a silly empty-headed clown, a clam and a hole-in-the-ground—h'm, store clerk! Do you remember how scared to death of a mouse he used to be? And he had the nerve to go around saying I was afraid of the sea! But *she*, on the other hand, *she* is something different. I won't mention her name, but I'll remember her till my dying day. But even so, "No, no, and no!" she would tell me. Just the same, she laughed every time she learned what it was I wanted, and never once mentioned it to that jackass husband of hers. The first night—no, it's not to be thought of; she only laughed, but just the same she never mentioned it to that jackass. You'll see, she'll do it yet, I thought to myself, and went to her the next night—but then she wasn't in, she had gone somewhere. I looked for her—but no! Next day I saw her again and she didn't have a mean word to say. . . .'

Edevart interrupted: 'You shot him, you say—but you didn't shoot so that he died, did you?'

August: 'But that's what he deserved! However, I didn't shoot him, I simply pounded him with a stone.'

August became more and more idiotic and Edevart was anxious to leave; and he tried in vain to pull his comrade away. August sat deeply engulfed in his memories—gay memories they must have been, too, for he laughed and shook his head; perhaps, too, he merely sat there inventing things and giving his imagination free play. When he began to talk again, it was about a party at Knoffs', a Sunday outing; he had taken his accordion with him and had played. All the store folk had been there, the housekeeper, Romeo and Juliet, all the young people. Suddenly a tiny fieldmouse appeared in the grass. Magnus turned pale and jumped up. 'Let August take care of it!' cried Romeo. August did so, he got after the mouse and certainly took care of it. Ho, ho, ho! laughed August, slapping his knees. Later it came time to eat; they had brought food with them and the tinned meat had to be heated, but no one knew how to manage it. So once again they turned to August. In the twinkling of an eye he made a camp stove out of stones, started a fire, warmed the cans and opened them. And then he manœuvred it so that that jackass Magnus was last to be served from a can of ptarmigan; there were only remnants left in the tin and so into it, then, he laid the mouse.

'Oh!' groaned his listeners in the booth, for some of them were sitting there at their meals.

'Ay!' called out August, spurred on by his own tale. 'I stirred the mouse well into the sauce and—"Now Magnus, if you'll be so good." Ah, ha. Then Magnus began to eat, picking out the smaller pieces first. "And what may this be?" he next asked. "That," I answered, "maybe that's a piece of the breast or something, so you can safely eat it." And sure enough, Magnus bit into it, but spit it out immediately, exactly as though he could tell by the taste of it that it was a mouse.'

'Couldn't he see what it was?' asked the listeners.

August: 'It wasn't so easy to tell what it was, for you see I had cut off the mouse's legs and covered it up with sauce.'

Silence. No one laughed. Finally some one asked: 'Why did you play him such a nasty trick?'

'H'm. Why did I do it?' August answered cunningly: 'I wanted to cure him of his mouse fright. Wasn't that kind of me? That's the very way we cure sea-sickness aboard ship—we make him swallow it again. . . .'

'Enough of that!' cried Mattea. 'Can't you see that folk are sitting here trying to eat?'

Opinion as to August's behaviour was divided, and some one asked: 'But how did things end, did he go after you?'

'Ay, so it turned out that I had to pound him with a stone!' answered August. 'He didn't understand that I wanted to do him a favour.'

But the coolness of his audience chilled August's enthusiasm—he couldn't stand disapproval; and then, too, maybe the whole thing had been no more than rank fiction. Anyway by this time he was too drunk to know what he was talking about.

Edevart stood in his booth, selling. Business was poor at first but those who came to him once returned later bringing others with them, for Edevart had decided to sell for what he could get simply to be rid of the goods he had brought with him in the four-oar.

August was of little use to him; now and again he would turn up, all flags flying and ready for anything—he had lost none of his wildness, and reeled off many a mad plan for Edevart's benefit, among them a suggestion that they sell the boat and buy a hand-organ.

Edevart shook his head.

August: 'If I could get a hand-organ to travel around

with, I'd buy me a little bear cub down there in the circus tent and earn more than ever you could here in this booth of yours.'

Edevart asked him why he wouldn't rather play his accordion.

'No,' said August. 'For I promised Mattea to play the accordion for her some day to attract customers to her eating place. There'll be a dance, and I promise you she'll have plenty of customers then!'

August had other ideas as well. 'How would it be to invent a powder good for gout and sell it here at the fair? But anyway I'm now working on something even better. But I wouldn't tell you what it is even if you killed me!'

Edevart knew from experience that his comrade could think up all manner of schemes, so he didn't laugh at his idea, merely tried to restrain him. 'I'm a bit worried about you, August,' he said. 'Now don't go and do something that will get you into trouble!'

August, indifferently: 'Don't you worry about me! And now I will tell you exactly what I have in mind: it's pills for the womenfolk to take to keep from having children. I mentioned it to you once before but you wouldn't even listen to it.'

'And I don't want to hear about it now, either.'

'Oh, kiss me to-morrow!' said August and continued: 'It'll be a wonder if I don't clean up on the idea. And knowing as many languages as I do, as well as English and Russian, I certainly ought to be able to hit on a good name for it. Once when I was knocking around with a ship's officer, he showed me a little bottle of snow-white pills he was carrying in his pocket—they had quick-silver in them and he used them on his wife when he was home, he said. But he didn't dare leave the bottle home when he left; no, for then, you see, his wife could run around all she wanted to and simply use the pills.

He showed me the bottle and on the label it said *Secale Cornutum.* I've remembered that all these years.'

'You might at least once in a while stand here in the booth and give me a chance to get out,' said Edevart.

August, ignoring the remark: 'Good Lord, but I could sell a lot of such pills here to all the lads—Oh, yes, and to the girls, too, for that matter!'

Edevart: 'I'd like to go out and get me a bite to eat!'

'Well, well. All right, I'll be back to relieve you,' said August and left.

But he didn't come back. In the evening, Edevart closed the booth and took a walk up through the town; he bought himself some buns at the bakery and nibbled them as he walked.

Now in the quiet of the summer evening the fair was in full swing; noises of all descriptions—whistling and singing and beating of tin pans. Folk made the most of this opportunity to enjoy themselves; some of the young lads had got hold of some *brændevin* which had made them quarrelsome and over-anxious to shake their fists in each other's faces.

Edevart recognized two short swarthy men with a hand-organ—oh, the Hungarian and the Armenian again! And so they had kept on with that miserable worn-out performance of theirs—one turned the crank while the other knocked him down with a blow of his fist, at the same time smearing his face with berry juice; having once learned this trick, they kept on with it. Poor fakirs, too many knew them now—they were a novelty only to the children. And business was poor with them, too, a penny here and there, and after an attack perhaps two pennies or so.

Papst had come as well! that eternal watch Jew, Papst; older, his beard whiter now, but just as fat as ever as he shuffled along in that enormous ankle-length coat of

his and with all his many watch-chains strung across his belly. Oh, but he was no longer as serene as formerly; he was old and worn out now and his face was a mass of wrinkles. He did not recognize Edevart immediately, but after he had stared at him for a time, he placed him in his memory and, without winking, pronounced his name. A miracle it was, after all these many years and with all Papst's thousands of acquaintances throughout the length and breadth of the land to confuse his memory. It was one of the things he had taught himself; to recognize people when he met them again and, having practised his art for so many years, he had become a master of it.

They fell into friendly conversation; Edevart showed him that he still had his watch and that he had never once been obliged to have it repaired. Papst opened it and said: 'Ay, but now it ought to be cleaned. Let me have it for a couple of days and you'll get it back as good as new.'

'Wouldn't it be better to wait till it stops?' asked Edevart.

'But that would be a pity for such a delicate movement,' said Papst. 'Look here, you can have this watch in the meantime—it, too, keeps very good time. And now, how about it, wouldn't you like to sell watches for me again?'

'I can't. I have my own booth here at the fair to look after.'

'Ho! So you have a booth of your own! I'm glad to know that you are now a big trader. But how about evenings?'

'No, you must excuse me,' said Edevart. 'All day long I stand in the booth and in the evening I have to give myself a bit of freedom.'

'I have a few watches which I would like to get rid

of here, good watches, cheap watches; I'm selling out. God knows, if I'll ever be coming back here any more.'

'Are you thinking of going away?'

'Maybe I'll die, I'm an old man. If you will sell ten watches, then you may have the eleventh for nothing. I want to get rid of them.'

Edevart: 'No, no; I don't even dare consider it. But I have a comrade here who will do it for you, maybe. A wonderful lad for business.'

'Where is he?'

'I'll send him to you to-morrow.'

Daylight began to fail. Edevart went down to the waterfront to see if the four-oar still lay in its place, and ay, there it was—evidently August had not gone entirely crazy, since he hadn't sold it yet. He walked past Mattea's place and noticed many folk gathered about outside; it was black with folk. The door stood open and the booth was crowded as well; there was music, accordion music; August was playing. Oh, that August! He surely wouldn't make a thing out of his concert, but he cared nothing for that.

Edevart forced his way in through the crowd about the door. Both Nils and Mattea were busy serving food and drinks to a full house. There was an impressive lack of seats—boys and girls sat on each other's laps there in the semi-darkness. After a rousing march, August beckoned to Mattea and asked: 'And what will I get for this?'

Mattea never kept her promises anyway, and so she answered: 'Whatever you want!'

August nodded, ran his fingers lightly over the keys of that mighty accordion of his and looked out over the crowd. Then he did something which astonished one and all and silenced every tongue—he sang as he played, ay, sang to the accompaniment of his deeply melancholy music a sea chanty all in English, something about love

and knife thrusts and a girl in Barcelona. Oh, August was a master of effect!

He finished and sat there without moving. No one had understood the words of his song, but all realized how pretty it was, none the less; some were on the point of giving him money, but Mattea restrained them, whispering to right and to left: 'He doesn't need it, that lad, he has a big booth here at the fair, stuffed with goods from top to bottom. Haven't you been there yet? I advise you to go there to-morrow. And there is his comrade!' she whispered, pointing to Edevart. 'They're in it together and are doing a big business——'

Teodor appeared; he had been off by himself all this time and now he turned up here simply to show his own importance. 'Ay, the three of us are here in the boat together,' he said. 'These are my comrades. Do I know them? I should say so!'

August stood up on his chair, pointed and gave orders to move the tables and chairs back against the wall, for now there would be a dance! Well, well! So they moved the furniture out of the way and then the dancing began, dancing which shook the booth until its joints creaked. And Henrik Sten was there and triumphantly carried the day with one girl after another, for a true conqueror of ladies' hearts he was. Oh, but there was no one could equal the strength of Eide Nikolaisen when it came to lifting his partner's feet from the floor during the dance. It was a glorious evening. Even Nils and Mattea, though they had to serve their guests who were packed along the walls, found time to dance some little waltz now and then. God knows, Nils had probably been treated to more than one drink, and toward the close of the party, his wife dragged Edevart into the darkest corner and, wild and intoxicated, threw herself in his lap. Oh, what a night!

When the last couples were getting ready to leave,

August stopped playing. Nils and Mattea had had a good day, and could well be satisfied with their sale of hot and cold dishes, beer and smuggled *brændevin.* But when August rose to claim the reward he had been promised for his music, Mattea had disappeared and only Nils was still about, cleaning up and putting the place in order there in the semi-darkness. August waited for a while, went into the kitchen and searched—but no, Mattea was nowhere about.

'What do you want of her?' asked Nils.

'I want to say good night!' answered August.

'I guess she's gone to bed already,' said Nils.

A sad and miserable ending to the party for August. Edevart persistently coaxed him: 'Come along August, I want to talk to you about something!'

When at last August was ready to leave, he muttered furiously: 'Ay, what a sweet posy she turned out to be!'

August hired out to Papst. That wasn't so bad, devil take him if it was; he even bragged about it. He worked for one full day, selling watches there on the fair grounds; folk recognized him—why, that was the musician of last night, he who had played there in the eating place and sung like a veritable angel; the young folk were eager to trade with him. And August kept to himself the fact that he was selling for Papst—on the contrary, he preferred to let folk think him grand enough to have something of a watch business in addition to his regular concession. It increased the importance of his position and even dazzled August himself, reminding him somewhat of the time he had sold diamonds and valuables at the fair in Levanger.

Early in the evening August came to Edevart with the announcement that he was through.

Through? Why?

Oh, yes, for now he had sold ten watches and earned for himself the eleventh; that was the end of that.

Edevart shook his head.

'It's no use,' said August. 'I won't do it. Why should I break my neck just to fatten up that old money hog? What if he should bust? He gives me a pain! Did you see that wallet of his? If he was to show himself in any other country with a wallet like that, he'd be a dead man before he knew it. And besides that, look at all those watches! Why, he's loaded down with watches in every pocket of his clothes to say nothing of a big iron chest of them he's got up in his room. You never saw anything like it. Why should I break my neck to put more money in his pocket? For once get some sense into that head of yours and think sharp: if all the young lads buy themselves watches, they won't have any money left for anything else and so they won't come to our booth and buy things from us. I've thought it all out and nobody can put it over on me! But just the same, I earned me a watch by working only one day and that's not so bad.' August was cleaning one arm with the sleeve of the other; he laughed softly and seemed thoroughly well satisfied with himself. 'Do you know,' he said, 'we ought to drop around at Mattea's place and get something to eat. I haven't put a thing into me all day long.'

'I can't close up yet,' said Edevart. 'But you go to Mattea's first and then come back and relieve me. How about it?'

'Ay. You don't happen to have a couple of dollars, do you? That's good, for I'm broke.'

Edevart guessed that his comrade was in a hurry to show off with that new watch of his and so he did not detain him.

'I'll be right back,' August nodded just as he was leaving.

He didn't come back. Edevart remained until closing time and had many customers to wait on; he had to be indulgent with August, for the fact of the matter was that the dance of the evening before—August's playing and Mattea's publicity—had brought him a large number of customers; Edevart sold as he never had before and got rid of expensive objects and woollen goods he would otherwise have been obliged to carry back home with him. He had had an unexpectedly good day and just before closing, he laid aside a downright handsome piece of dress material for Ragna home in Polden.

As usual, he ate his supper of wheat buns as he strolled about the town. He encountered Teodor and one of last night's dancers, Henrik Sten; they were standing talking together.

Teodor said: 'To-morrow I start selling watches for Papst.'

'So?' said Edevart.

'Ay, he asked me to.'

Edevart rambled on; he went down to where the tents and the merry-go-round were. Behind the circus tent he saw August standing with his arms around a short-haired lady who belonged to the troupe of animal tamers, the one whose act it was to appear in riding boots with a bear on one side and a wolf on the other. Ay, here was August and his latest lady friend! Spying Edevart, he called out impatiently: 'I'm coming right away!' Edevart turned on his heel and walked in another direction.

The following morning old Papst came to his booth and gave Edevart back his watch. 'Now it is clean and in perfect order,' he said.

Edevart looked at it, listened to it and said: 'It looks as though you polished it outside as well; it looks brand new.'

Ay, Papst had polished up the case a bit, too. He began to talk about August: 'No, that fellow hasn't any per-

severance; he's a good enough salesman but he gets drunk and talks too much. I knew him again as soon as he came to me; he was your skipper that time in Kristianssund; he had gold teeth. No, he won't sell watches another day. But now I have your brother working for me, he will probably be more dependable.'

'My brother? I haven't any brother here.'

'What—he said he was your brother—Teodor—'

'No, no, he isn't my brother. Did he say he was?'

'He came to me last evening and said that he was your brother and that he wanted to sell watches for me. Don't you know him?'

'Of course. But he is not my brother, we aren't in the least related, far from it!'

'And I gave him eleven watches this morning!' said Papst, preparing to leave. He had become restless, shook his shaggy head, and added: 'You know, Edevart, I was a bit suspicious of him myself, he was different—how shall I say?—different from you, and that's why I wanted to hear what you thought. Do you think it's likely he will run away?'

'No. He's with me in the boat so he can't leave until I do.'

Silence. Papst thought a while and said: 'I'll try him out; don't you think that's best?'

'Of course. He certainly isn't foolish enough to think he can steal eleven watches. . . .'

August away for another entire day, Edevart keeping store alone. He laid out all his merchandise, spread it out until it reached to the open door and wrote prices on everything. He did wisely, too, for folk stopped, read the prices, felt the goods and came inside and bought them. His wallet was filling up with paper bills and he still had another day for business before him, the last day.

In the evening he meets Teodor and says: 'Have you been out pretending to be my brother?'

'Who, me?' says Teodor, and will not allow himself to be caught.

'You told Papst that you were my brother.'

'What a damned liar that old pot-belly is! Oh, ho, now I understand it!' cried Teodor, relieved. 'I didn't say that I was your brother, I said that we both come from the same village and are just like brothers because we know each other so well.'

Edevart considers. That was a good explanation, an extremely plausible explanation; the old Jew was of course a foreigner and might have easily misunderstood Teodor's words.

'Have you sold any watches yet?' asks Edevart.

'Eight watches and now I'm on my way to settle up with him. I have two watches left; ay, and besides those, my own. I've been waiting so long for a chance to get me a watch.'

Two hours later: It was approaching midnight, already quite dark, and Edevart was on his way home to the booth to go to bed, when something strange happened to him. It began like this: suddenly some distance down the street in front of him, he sees a man walking, a man who has apparently come out from one of the houses. This was nothing suspicious in itself and Edevart paid no further attention to it. But when the man began to run, Edevart was somewhat surprised and immediately thought of August—he had probably got himself into some foolish scrape again, so after him he went. What was the man running for? It was a quiet hour of the night, and Edevart saw no evidence of a chase. He called August's name once but received no response. The fugitive did not halt and disappeared around the corner. Edevart ran. He noticed that the door of one of the houses was half open; it was swinging on its hinges, then gently came to rest. It might have been the wind that had set it in motion, but then it might also have been that some one had just en-

tered the house. Edevart sprang through the doorway and the door shook and came to rest again. He was in a dark passage. 'August!' he called. No answer. Edevart held out his hands in front of him and groped his way forward. He ran into a wall and could go no further. Fumbling about the wall, he discovered a staircase. Just as he began to climb the stairs to a second storey, the door opened again and the man slipped out. Edevart after him. Not until now did he realize that this man was not August. But he knew him none the less and was determined to stop him and demand an explanation—it was one of last night's dancers. Ay, the blacksmith.

'What in the world are you running for?' laughed Edevart, stopping him.

'And what are you running for yourself!' was the answer. 'Have I done anything to you?'

Edevart would have to explain himself: he had thought it was August, his comrade, who had got himself into a scrape and was trying to avoid being caught; in any case, the whole thing had been a mistake.

'Well, then all you have to do is get out!' muttered the blacksmith, preparing to run again; he looked around and was extremely restless and ter ».

'Where are you going to?' asked Edevart.

'What business of yours is that? Get out of here!'

Now this was the very thing which the man ought not to have said; Edevart could not tolerate any such tone of voice. Quite the contrary! He simply rushed his man.

'What in hell—!' hissed the blacksmith, aiming a blow.

During the fracas neither of them gained the upper hand, but Edevart who, from past experience knew how to take care of himself in a fight, held his ground. The worst of it all was that the blacksmith hit with a key; then too, he was a husky giant and Edevart was unable to trip him up with that dangerous 'crowfoot' of his.

'You store rat!' hissed the blacksmith.

'Ho, you're using a key!' screamed Edevart back at him. 'So to hell with you!' And with that, he let fly with a kick at the blacksmith's body—let it land where it would! But it did no particular damage and the next time Edevart raised his leg to kick, the blacksmith grabbed it like a flash and threw him.

By the time he had regained his feet the blacksmith was far away. Edevart did not set after him at once, for he was detained by the raising of a window and the voice of a man who called out: 'Did he hurt you very badly?'

'No.'

'Your face is bloody.'

'He hit with a key.'

'Ay, it was the blacksmith. He always uses a key.'

'What was he running for?' asked Edevart.

'I don't know.'

The blacksmith was now almost out of sight and Edevart gave up the chase. What was that man to him anyway, why shouldn't he run through the streets if he wanted to? Edevart returned the way he had come, stiff and weary. Near the spot where the chase had begun he again encountered Teodor, standing there with Papst. The old Jew, in a state of great agitation, was gripping his arm tightly.

'Oh, a decent man at last!' the watch pedlar cried out. 'Edevart, come here; they have attacked me, they wanted to rob me and murder me, and here is one of them!'

Edevart looked from one to the other and, addressing Teodor asked: 'Did you attack Papst?'

'Who, me?' cried Teodor, innocently. 'Not any more than you!'

'Oh, yes, he was one of them!' insisted Papst with conviction. 'There was another, but he ran away. I had gone to bed when in comes a man, I know him, he is dark in the face, brown skin, black beard, horrible, Papst knows everybody—he is the blacksmith. What did he want? He

wanted to buy a watch. No, no, I'm in bed, to-morrow! Oh, yes, this very night, for he was going away. I became frightened and understood the whole thing, there is some one out in the hall, there are two of them, he wants to do business with me and when I take out my money he will snatch my wallet and run. Why must there be so much evil and sin against poor old Papst? There I lie in bed, he can throw himself upon me and choke me, I become frightened and do not dare to cry out, it is terrible, he will choke me. "The money!" he will say, "Give me your wallet!" I rap on the bed as a sign of humility and am frightened, I hear some one out in the hall—this fellow here!'

'Me?' cried Teodor again. 'You saw me?'

'Keep still! He insists absolutely on buying a watch, I am out of my senses and say: "If it's my money you are after, it's in that chest there!" "No, look under the pillow!" cried this fellow here from the hall. Weren't there two, then?'

'I had been there to settle up with you,' began Teodor. . . .

'Yes, and you saw that I put my wallet under my pillow afterwards. Keep still!'

'No, I came long before the blacksmith and left as soon as I had settled up with you. Didn't I give you back all that was coming to you?'

'He simply wants to buy a watch, I am frightened he will kill me and I beg of him and rap on the bed. "In the chest," I say. "The chest down there on the floor!" He says: "Come on, the key, then!" but I risk it and say: "Look in the chest!" "Under the pillow!" says he out in the hall again. A horrible moment, it is death, two murderers. Then maybe he hears something, he listens and becomes alarmed. "Hurry up!" says he out in the hall, and so with that, he goes out through the door. Yes, and you, my good friend, were with him—oh, yes, you were!'

Teodor: 'That's the biggest lie that ever was told! Did

you see me, I ask you? I came and settled up for the eight watches I had sold, and didn't I reckon it up honestly? Now all I want to know is: have you any complaint to make as to the way I settled up with you?'

'Settle up—settle up!——,' said Papst. 'You were with him.'

'How could I be with him when the blacksmith came long after I'd gone?'

Edevart: 'How do you know that the blacksmith came long after you'd gone?'

'Ho, ho, yes!' said Papst. 'How do you know that?'

'How do I know that?' A ray of light darts through that quick brain of Teodor's and he answers: 'Because I met the blacksmith a long way down the street after I'd turned in my watches. And maybe that was when he was on his way to Papst. How do I know?'

'Why did you stop here just now? Have you been up to Papst's place again?'

'No, I was only walking around.'

'I put on my clothes and went out and here he stood,' said Papst. 'Oh, he was with the other one, and just now he must have come back to see how things would turn out. Help me, Edevart!'

What could Edevart do? The whole thing was without great significance, Papst had lost no money, he was simply frightened to death; but his story was probably true enough—the blacksmith had bolted, Edevart himself had overtaken him and come to blows with him. You see, when it came to the final issue, the blacksmith had become nervous and wanted to get away from the scene of his deed, he was no practised thief—this was perhaps the first time he had ever attempted such a thing. There were no great thieves at the Stokmarknes Fair, merely youngsters, novices who became easily alarmed and fled. Now August, he could tell about real thieves and bandits, he could—ay,

and how he would laugh when he heard about the flight of the blacksmith this evening!

But the fact that there had been a man out in the hall complicated the whole affair; those quiet calls had betrayed the presence of an accomplice. The police might possibly nab the man, but who were the police? Every man was his own policeman here in this peaceful place; thus it was at all these fairs, and why should it be otherwise? Was it Teodor who had lurked in the hall? Teodor was no thoroughgoing thief, either,—merely a crafty filcher, and he might easily have been the one who had remained in hiding while the other performed the deed—Edevart did not trust him. On the other hand, who could conceive of such a stupid robbery? Ho, nothing had actually happened—neither hold-up nor murder—it was merely that Papst had been given the scare of his life.

While Edevart is thinking the matter over, Teodor says in order to ingratiate himself: 'My goodness, how you do look; have you been in a fight?'

Edevart: 'You were standing right here talking with a man, weren't you?'

'Ay,' answered Teodor. 'A man named Henrik Sten.'

'Then couldn't it have been him who stood outside the door?'

Teodor cries: 'There, you see! Ay, you'll see that it was that Henrik Sten! For the blacksmith and he are comrades, right enough. Ho, what do you say to that?' he asked, turning triumphantly to Papst.

Papst answered curtly: 'Out of the question! I'll give my oath——'

But then Teodor assumed the air of a great bold fellow; he clenched his fist and held it up in front of the Jew's beard, shook it a few times and threatened to drag Papst before the law.

'You were with him!' stubbornly insisted Papst.

'I can't be bothered talking to you!' says Teodor and leaves him.

The two are left alone. Edevart wished to cheer up the old Jew and said: 'It was shameful of them to disturb your night's rest like that!'

Papst wags his head; 'Yes, yes, it was the blacksmith, he would have strangled me, a terrible moment——'

'I knew at once that something was wrong, I've just been in a fight with the smith.'

'What, out here? With that same robber? There you see, dark in the face, a murderer. Did you give him a good sound beating?'

'No, he threw me down.'

'We'll report him.'

'It was lucky that you had your wallet in the chest,' said Edevart.

'What—oh, yes——'

'For he wouldn't have been able to run off with that heavy iron chest.'

'No—oh, no. But you see, Edevart,' Papst whispered, 'my wallet wasn't in the chest at all.'

'Not in the chest?'

'No. Under my pillow, said the fellow out in the hall—no, and I fooled him there, too; I had it at the foot of my bed, under all the bed-clothes. Yes, that's what I did. When he came to settle up with me and give me a few dollars, I laid the wallet under my pillow so he could see where I put it, but he didn't look like an honest man in the eyes, and as soon as he was out of the door, I put the wallet down at the foot of the bed. I fooled him! Papst sees through folk every time. But just the same that was a terrible moment, two murderers.'

Papst began to calm down and Edevart prepared to leave him.

'It was a pity he threw you down,' said Papst. 'Did he hit you?'

'Ay, but I drew blood on him, too.'

Papst, with childish interest: 'So? You drew blood?'

'He hit with a key, but I found me a stone,' lied Edevart.

'Splendid! You're a great one, Edevart!'

It was fun to give the old man so much joy with so little, and Edevart lied further: 'I gave it to him good, too, and that you may believe. I kicked him in the arm and broke it.'

'One of his arms is broken!' rejoiced Papst in ecstasy. 'One of those horrible arms of his! Did he yell?'

'I'll be hanged if he didn't yell!'

'Oh, that was good! I'll never forget you, Edevart, I shall always bless you for it. How did he yell? Did he moan?'

'No, it must have hurt him a lot—he bellowed.'

'Bellowed—oh, thanks, thanks, you paid him back for what he did to me! No one has ever defended my life except you, Edevart. What do all the others care about old Papst's life? Nothing. Look here, Edevart,' says Papst and digs down into one of his pockets. 'I have something for you, here is your watch, you shall have it back again.'

Edevart stares, speechless.

'You see, I mixed things up in my pocket and gave you a bad watch instead of your own—I didn't notice it until later. You must forgive an old man. But here it is now, I am an honest soul and will exchange with you, come give me the other.'

Edevart turned homeward. He had no faith in Teodor, no, of course not; but he no longer had any faith in Papst, either.

He found the door of his booth open, the lock shattered —what in this world? He walked in and there in the corner where he was in the habit of sleeping, he saw something crouching, something curled up in a ball, like the

beginnings of a human being—it was August. 'Dead-drunk!' thought Edevart.

August speaks in a dying voice: 'I've been stabbed; they carried me here. We had to break open the door.'

'You say you've been stabbed? How?'

'With a knife. They've gone for the doctor.'

August was unable to talk much, he said, for he had lost a great deal of blood; however, he managed to explain in a few words that he had been stabbed by one of the menagerie attendants, a madman. August was utterly miserable; all his wildness had left him and now he was going to die; he could feel that he was bathed in blood.

'Where is the wound?' asked Edevart. 'In your chest? H'm, let me bind something over it.'

'No, no! There's a bandage on it already; the others put it there and I'm holding it on as I lie here. But it's no use; I can feel how it drips and drips . . . I'll die all right, Edevart. Now I'll get punished for what we did to her; like crazy we were and she died, too.'

'Who are you talking about?'

'The nigger girl. We killed her. Four of us went after her and she couldn't stand it; the last one that had her said that she died, for he left his hand over her mouth too long.'

'Is that what kind of swine out of hell you were?'

'Ay,' said August.

Silence. August attempted to draw a long breath and said: 'Oh, if only I could have hands over me!'

Edevart: 'Hands?'

'Ay, hands that would bless me. A parson!'

'Is that what you'd like?'

'I don't know. When I was being confirmed at the altar, the parson laid his hand on my head and blessed me or whatever it is you call it.'

Silence. Edevart asked: 'You say they went for the doctor?'

'Ay. But that won't do me any good now; I can feel how I'm bleeding to death. Don't you know where you could find the parson?'

'No.'

'You might at least be willing to try and find him!'

Edevart was silent. Possibly he was thinking of the lateness of the hour.

August coaxed gently: 'I'm not asking you to do it for nothing, Edevart. After I'm dead, you can take and break out these teeth of mine.'

'What are you talking about!' cried Edevart.

'Ay, that's what you must do—take a pair of pliers and rip them out of my mouth. They're worth money!'

'That I will never do!'

'You mean you're afraid I'll come back and haunt you because of them? No, you needn't worry about that, for I won't be needing them any more then. It's exactly like the case of that ring of Skaaro's—can't he be saved just the same without a gold ring! I tell you, Edevart, you must take these teeth of mine, for I haven't another blessed thing to leave you. And that isn't much, either, not even enough to pay you for finding me a parson—no, for maybe the gold that's in them is cheap trash——'

Some one is at the door, two men and the doctor. They ask: 'Where is he? Isn't there a lamp here? Take and carry him out here to the door!'

August convulsively clutches his wound and the doctor is obliged to remove his hand by main force. Well, well, a bit of blood on shirt and chest, but the wound is bleeding very little now—nothing serious. The doctor asks if the knife had gone in very far. Ay, very far indeed, answers August. How far? August doesn't know. 'Draw a breath!' says the doctor. August draws a breath. The doctor thrusts a probe into the wound to determine its actual depth and August grits his teeth during this moment of torture. 'It isn't very deep,' says the doctor. But August

smiles bitterly at this and says: 'It hurts clean through to my back!'

'Ay,' answers the doctor. 'You were lying in a draught back there in the corner.'

The wound is swabbed with cotton dipped in alcohol and August whines because this smarts; then it is bandaged properly and the patient is carried back to his corner and covered up with various pieces of material from the shelves. While paying the doctor, Edevart asks: 'Is it anything dangerous?'

'Not a bit,' answers the doctor. 'Just leave the wound alone and give it time to heal!'

When August learned what the doctor's verdict had been, he again smiled bitterly. And during the first couple of days August smiled no other way save bitterly, but later when the wound began to itch, clearly indicating that it was healing, August cheered up and related how the misfortune had occurred, and he never ceased to ridicule the man who made such poor work of stabbing with a knife. 'This ought to have been some other country!' said he.

Naturally there was a woman in the case, that same animal trainer person with whom August had recently become friends. Of late August had spent his entire time down at the circus—since he had given evidence of what a master musician he was, he had been engaged by the circus to play a number once every hour; the lady had been especially grateful to him on this account and had allowed herself to be kissed. This was the program as it had been arranged: August blares forth his most rousing march just as she stalks into the arena; then, suddenly, he halts his music in the very middle of a phrase as she stands there between her two ferocious beasts. August with his world-wide experience, had hit upon this idea. The whole thing was arranged, the director had promised August two dollars every afternoon and had printed enor-

mous placards announcing August's appearance and hung them up at the entrance to the circus tent.

Good! August played and the reputation he had gained for himself the evening of the dance drew large audiences for every hourly performance. His trick of suddenly halting his music as though he himself were overcome by deathly terror, caused the spectators to gasp with emotion, while the director rubbed his hands, and the lady herself was enraptured.

Oh, yes, the affair came off splendidly. There had been but one disturbing circumstance: during the third performance a young man, one of the keepers of the menagerie, came up to August and ordered him to keep away from the lady. 'Ho,' August replied, laughing with that golden mouth of his. Yes! said the keeper, for the lady was his sweetheart. 'That's one thing I don't believe!' August answered. 'You've got a lying tongue!' This had enraged the keeper and he had sworn like a trooper and threatened August with violence. 'On my honour!' he said. 'On your what?' asked August. 'Yes, on my honour!' Then August had laughed with all his gold teeth and urged that such high and mighty language ill befitted a man of his lowly station in life. 'Go on, get out!'

And the keeper had disappeared.

Then August played for the last time, played as though his life depended upon it—he wanted to outdo even himself, and thundered forth nothing less than the mighty *Marche Napoleon* which none here had ever heard before; he made his heart-rending pause in the midst of his music and was finished. But this time, just as the lady concluded her tricks with the bear and the wolf, something unexpected occurred: August finished playing the march in time for her exit from the arena. That had been something extra and extraordinary and the audience had yelled and clapped their approval; the lady returned several times to the arena to bow her thanks to the accompaniment of

August's vociferous playing. Finally he closed his accordion and left the arena himself. Now he would collect his pay.

He walked behind the scene and there stood the lady waiting for him; she threw herself ecstatically into his arms and promised him her love. And at this very moment the keeper had leaped upon him, delivered his murderous knife thrust and quickly vanished.

Then a riot ensued. Stunned, August crumpled up. But none the less he could hear the cries and shrieks from every side. The director came running up, then another man came, a man with gold braid about his cap—the police! But the police did not prove to be dangerous; he suffered the inconvenience of receiving a handful of horse dung in his eyes and had to beat a quick retreat.

'Who threw it?' asked Edevart. 'The other keeper?'

'No, there was only one keeper. Do you know what I think?' said August. 'So help me God, I think that it was the lady herself who threw the horse dung in order to protect that lover of hers! To hell with her!'

'Well, and then what happened?'

'I don't know,' answered August. 'Some of the audience from the circus came and helped me and brought me here. They also ran for the doctor—kind folk, I don't even know who they were. I might have been a dead man right there on the spot! But now you will have to go to the circus and collect my two dollars for me; I haven't a penny left to my name.'

'If only the circus didn't leave yesterday when all the others left,' answered Edevart. 'I'll go and see!'

August called after him: 'And then you must go to the lady and get back that watch of mine. She borrowed it from me!'

Edevart ran out and returned at once. Naturally, the circus had left. He shook his head at his comrade and

said: 'So you've lost another watch of yours, eh? A brand-new watch!'

Ay, and August himself thought that it really was a hell of a note. But what could be done about it? She had been so up against it, never knowing what time it was and all that! What then, ought he to have been so mean and stingy as to refuse her? 'But I don't care a hang about the watch, anyway,' said August. 'It wasn't any good; it stopped every little while.'

Teodor broke in at this: 'Ay, the devil and all must have made those watches we were selling! Mine stopped, too! It only runs when I shake it! And for such trash as that I ran around for two good days!'

Merchants and visitors gone, the fair grounds are deserted, silence, nothing but silence!

Edevart and Teodor are simply waiting for August to recover. At length a day is set for the voyage home.

August had now begun to sit up for a little while each day and was really quite well again. He was extremely embarrassed by the memory of what he had betrayed to Edevart that first evening; so he never tired of flinging sarcasms at his would-be assassin. Lord, what a poor job he had made of it! He ought to have been ashamed of himself! His fingers must have been numb with fright! . . . August was extremely caustic in his remarks: he was accustomed to having the thrust of a knife mean death, he said; not this silly sort of thing which simply fooled folk into thinking they were killed. If only he could have got that animal keeper in his clutches!

CHAPTER TWENTY

JOAKIM was now ready to begin the work of enlarging his cow barn; there were to be two additional stalls and no more—not three stalls, and no stable room for a horse. August immediately stepped in and advised separate accommodations for two calves. But he was ignored. It did not hurt his feelings to be ignored—he was used to that—but Joakim had done it in such an unexpectedly cutting manner, asking if it wouldn't be a good idea to provide stable room for some canary birds as well. August unwisely overlooked this insult and at once offered his assistance in the matter of laying the foundation. But again he was refused and this time he was hurt to the quick, so much the more when Joakim called in a strange carpenter to help him with the work.

But even so, August was no man to sit and twiddle his thumbs and so one day he set to work making a mail box. He painted it blood red, got Joakim to letter it with the word 'Mail' and with that hung it up outside the store, proud as the deuce of his work. The villagers wondered what he was going to do with a mail box without a post office, but August asked why, if there were mail boxes outside all the country stores in Australia, there shouldn't be one here, too? Folk in Polden could now bring their Lofoten letters and their love letters and drop them in the box and be certain that they would be taken to the post office regularly once a week by the folk who were going to church. And for that matter, August said, the time had about arrived when they ought to be demanding a post office right here in Polden, for it was getting to be an important place.

Well, well, he was a wild sort of chap, wasn't he? Ay, and that he had been all the days of his life; not even a mortal knife thrust in the breast could tame him. But August was, after all, Polden's one and only August and round-the-world traveller and it wasn't so bad to have him around. Why had the village girls taken him seriously those many years ago when he had first returned home?—and later not at all? Perhaps because he had never been able to offer them sure support. Ay, but who in the whole parish could have offered them that, when you come down to a fine point? As it now was, the girls could flirt with him to their hearts' content and vow their undying love, and there sat August weaponless, withdrawn into himself and smiling.

At all events, it was not at all bad to have this man in their midst, for he set things in motion and left his stamp wherever he went. His star of fortune rose and set in turn —had he been able to save his possessions from the wreck of the *Soleglad*, he might perhaps have turned out to be the hero most exalted by all Polden and the whole district round about. But no such dizzying heights had been his to scale; the years that followed had been unfortunate for him. However, laziness was foreign to his nature and even in his periods of futility, he was active. Look there at that red mail box, for example, see how it shines like a flame! It does not look like a blot on the outside of the store, it actually makes the store more attractive. Later in the summer placards will be tacked up around it, important announcements issued by the sheriff or the parson, it may be; ay, and perhaps even proclamations of inheritance bearing the lion seal of Norway! The mail box helped to make Polden's store a place of greater public importance.

Little Paulina was now the only 'Chief' behind the counter; everything passed through her head and hands, sales and purchases, prices and the establishment of credit. And her business was steadily developing. On his

return home, Edevart had handed over to her the few unsold goods he had brought back from the fair and every penny of the money he had realized on the enterprise. Joakim would now get back all and more than he had invested in the business and Edevart would again become the sole owner of the store.

But Edevart said to his sister: 'You can keep the store yourself; I wouldn't stop to pick it up even if you threw it at me!'

'What will you do with yourself, then?' asked his sister.

Ay, what was Edevart going to do with himself? He had gone steadily downhill; let one day after another go to waste, lazily, monotonously; he went about unshaven and with long hair, retired early in the evening and didn't fall asleep until along toward morning. . . .

Now look once more at August! Finished with the mail box, he immediately set to work making a hoist for the well, a great convenience for Paulina who next winter would have many cattle to water. Finished with the hoist, he calmly turned his attention back to the building of the new cow barn and soon made the services of the hired carpenter superfluous. August took command here and, on his own initiative, enlarged the foundation. By this time Joakim himself had come to the point where he felt he would need a box stall for his calves after all, but nevertheless, he refused to admit it. He asked August with feigned sharpness: 'What the devil do you think you're doing?'

'I'm making room for two calves,' answered August.

'That enormous space!' cried Joakim. 'Why, there's room enough there for at least six calves!'

August merely mumbled. He kept on with his work, while Joakim threatened him with all manner of revenge once the stable was finished.

Such was August, busy every day, crazy and scatterbrained but clever and alert.

And Edevart? God knew but that eventually he would have to seek alms of Hosea and Ezra and live with them and eat the bread of charity until the day he died. He was at the time equal to anything he might turn his hand to, but he never turned his hand to anything. What he needed most for his own good was nothing which could be achieved in a single day—the crab must proceed patiently on its long backward journey to the place from whence it started.

He received a letter from Romeo Knoff, an extremely cordial letter, and important as to contents: might not Romeo perhaps sell Doppen for him, since it did not seem likely that Edevart would ever live there and be able to make proper use of the farm? His neighbour, Karel, had two grown-up sons now and might consider buying Doppen for the elder. Romeo offered to take back the beds and linen which Edevart had bought from him on credit and which had hardly seen any use, and wished all in all to arrange matters in a mutually agreeable manner so that Edevart's debt to the store might be more or less wiped out. The boat could be included in the sale since it would be a necessity for the new owner. The matter of the waterfall, on the other hand, need not be discussed for the time being; Edevart could continue to own the falls. And if later he wanted to get rid of it and Romeo were to buy it, then there might be talk of putting up a mill there and in such an event, Romeo would be overjoyed to employ Edevart as superintendent of the mill, as his comrade, August, had hinted——

A beautifully courteous letter which closed with friendly greetings from his father and Romeo himself. Remarkable how rootless Edevart had become, for this letter from a strange man living in a strange place filled him with an emotion akin to homesickness. He forgot the days and years he had wasted there and for a moment longed to be back there once again. With the assistance

of Joakim, he replied that he had no objections to having Romeo sell Doppen for him and thanked Romeo for his generosity.

So now he was without a farm down south—in Polden he had a store which he did not care to own, so he was without a home anywhere at all! August was called into consultation; he nodded and said: 'You must come with me, we must both get away!'

And the days passed; the addition to the cow stable had already been roofed over, and was now to be finished up inside with stalls. One fine evening Paulina called Joakim to her and asked him to row out and catch some haddock for the table; she needed this very badly, she said, for without fish she would be unable to provide food for all her menfolk. This sounded innocent enough, but it was only part of a plot, for that night August and Edevart, bathed in sweat, laboured to put up the partitions in the cow stable according to their own ideas. Paulina came out and sat for a time looking on as they worked, but when the hour for Joakim to return approached, she rose and said she was going inside to be out of the way.

When Joakim returned along toward morning, the comrades had finished with the large box stall; they had partitioned off space easily large enough to house two calves, but with the remainder of the space they had made a stall for a horse! And not alone that, the horse must also have his own private entrance—they had cut a new door through the outside wall of the stable!

Joakim stood still and stared. Oh, but good Heavens, don't you suppose he had had some tiny suspicion of what was going to happen? He pretended to fall to the ground in sheer astonishment, but he did manage to speak. 'Are you downright crazy, you two!' he cried.

The culprits were silent.

'I asked you what you are thinking of?'

'Thinking of?' repeated August humbly.

Edevart asked: 'Is anything wrong?' And he excused himself by saying that he hadn't known any better, had merely done what he had been told.

August then took the floor and spoke in sweet and ingratiating manner, 'You see, Joakim, after thinking it over, I at last concluded that you were right and I was wrong about that box stall, it was too big. And so we put up this partition and left the stall just big enough for two calves. Don't you think it's big enough now? I'd like to have your opinion——'

Joakim, with a look of agony on his face: 'Ay, and if I didn't have these fish here in my hand, you'd know my opinion all right!'

Edevart, sweetly helpful: 'Couldn't you lay down the fish for the time being?'

August hastened to continue: 'And so of course we had all this room left over, we can't deny that; but it's still here, we didn't run off with it.'

And now it was just as though Joakim were trying to control himself in order to avoid disturbing people at this late hour of the night; he fussed about with the fish, attempting to remove one haddock from the string—this was merely to shield his perplexity and at the same time he asked: 'Is it a horse stall you've made of this place here?'

'Ay, a stall for the horse, that's what we were thinking of.'

'What horse?'

Edevart now spoke again: 'No, is that the way things are! I thought that naturally you both were agreed upon what was to be done here. If I had known that there was not to be a horse stall I would not have raised my hand to help build it.'

And at that moment Joakim succeeded in unfastening the haddock from the string and gave Edevart a slap

across the mouth with a large raw fish. When August saw what was happening, he stepped a bit to one side in order to have clear passage way in case of emergency; Edevart stood spitting and wiping his face.

Joakim turned to August and advanced on him cautiously. 'To-morrow I'll be ripping down that stall of yours. I won't be made a fool of by having a stall without a horse!'

'No, a horse you must have,' admitted August.

'What kind of a horse, I asked you once!'

Joakim had come so near him by this time that August had to edge away a bit as he answered: 'That Edevart, he didn't think you could run a farm and have five head of cattle without a horse.'

'Who, me?' cried Edevart, as though a thunderbolt had struck him.

'Ho, Edevart thought nothing of the kind! He's a great one to be thinking of things!' answered Joakim excitedly. 'And furthermore I haven't five head of cattle, I've three.'

'Ay, and one cow in Hosea's barn.'

'How did you know about that?'

'That makes four,' said August.

'Ay, that makes four,' mimicked Joakim furiously. 'But the fact is that four isn't five.'

'And then a new cow next year which makes five,' said Edevart, moving a good distance away.

'What the devil are you standing there talking about, a new cow next year?'

Edevart, defensively: 'That's what Paulina herself told me. And besides you set up five stalls yourself, didn't you?'

Joakim, for the moment speechless. 'Paulina?' said he. 'What does she know about it? Ho, Paulina, she must be in league with you two, and it's a good thing I happened to find out about it. Did you ever hear anything like it! But now, that Paulina will be blue in the face before she'll

get this string of fish, I'll tell you that much—I'll go off and give it to decent folk first!' And with that, Joakim strode off and quite innocently passed close enough to August to swing the string of fish and bring them down on the top of his head.

All three were obliged to laugh at this, but Joakim, of course, laughed somewhat sourly. He stalked with long strides over to the hut where the family of old Seaman Martinus lived and hung the string of fish on the door latch. . . .

And naturally the horse stall was not pulled down; Joakim would have to put up with it, since it was finished, until such a time as he could get him a horse. He had to put up with a good deal more as well from August, that author of all the mad things in the world; thus it was impossible for him to prevent August on another night from panelling off a snug little hen-roost right next to the horse stall, but with a free passage for the hens to all the other creatures. Little Paulina was deeply moved by this act of thoughtfulness and thanked August warmly, in secret, promising him something in return; but when Joakim demanded an explanation, August answered curtly! 'Ho, so it's only Gabrielsen who can keep hens, eh!'

August was up and doing even up until his last few days in Polden. He went to Head-man Karolus and demanded a post office to go with that mail box of his. Oh, no, August would tolerate no further delay in this matter; there outside the store the box had been hanging for many weeks now and not a single letter had been dropped in it thus far, and that was merely due to the lack of a local post office. How did Joakim feel about it? Joakim, who subscribed for a newspaper, could receive his copies only by going to church each Sunday to fetch them. That was the devil of a way! The matter would have to be taken up with the county government now, and it was Joakim who was to frame the petition. He promised to write it out in his

very best style: Polden was a large village and the folk from the districts round about all came here; the parson, the sheriff and others who wrote many letters would come out full-throated in favour of a post office; Head-man Karolus first and foremost, who frequently wrote to the district governor and the Government itself on official Polden business, and finally the store, the firm of Edevart Andreassen, and Paulina who sent letters and large sums of money off to the big merchants the year round. 'That's all there is to it, Karolus,' said August. 'Polden must have its own post office!'

Well, well. Karolus did not deny a single thing; the whole thing was reasonable and he said 'Ay' and 'Ay, indeed' and assured him that the affair would be taken up at the next meeting of the county board. Karolus said: 'And thanks you shall have, August, for thinking of it—here I've been writing important letters almost every day and gone about with them in my pocket until they became wrinkled and dirty before I could manage to send them off. Yes, we must take up the matter immediately, and the sooner the better as far as I am concerned.'

But poor Head-man Karolus, he was so anxious to do something, and willing and kind he was; but a really enterprising fellow he never had been and now for some time he had been in a daze, completely preoccupied with his own affairs. His farm work had to be attended to; soon mowing time would be upon him, and there was no one to help him save Teodor, although the latter had a rupture and was of very little use to him. And on top of it all, Ane Maria would be coming home now—Karolus had received definite information as to that, and he brooded over his personal affairs, wondering how he ought to behave toward her when she returned. But just the same—well, well, ay, Polden must have a post office.

'Let me see that you have it here when I get back!' said August.

'Are you going away?'

'Ay, I'm going away.'

'Ho. Where are you going?'

'Well, first of all I think I'll take a little run over to India and South America. I have a fortune or two I'll have to be seeing to over there.'

'India and South America!' repeated Karolus. 'Then you won't be coming back to Polden for a long time?'

'No. But if ever I write you a letter or send home a treasure chest or such-like, I'll address it to *Polden P.O.* so you'd better see that it's built.'

August is pulling up stakes and setting out again. He is unable to get Edevart to go along with him, but that doesn't mean that Edevart is of a mind to settle down in Polden—no, he, too, is an incurable vagabond and Polden no longer means anything to him. He would like to leave the place, but he cannot bring himself to go to Paulina for travel money now that she has just helped August to get away.

August is going to Bergen where he will ship for the seven seas. Paulina has outfitted him handsomely with clothes, Ezra and Hosea have both come down to say farewell, their aged father takes both August's hands and asks God's blessings on his voyage and Joakim and Edevart row him to the steamer landing.

Edevart, that Big Brother, that comrade who has been severed from nearly everything in the world, speaks: 'Ay, let me see that you really do join the crew of a ship this time and that you don't fool away your time at something else!'

August makes no reply to this, but he says: 'It worries me that we didn't make room for a pigsty while we were about it.'

Joakim ignores this remark.

When they arrived, the steamer was already in sight

coming into the fjord, and August hastily took Edevart aside and said to him: 'That story that I told you down at the fair the night I was stabbed with a knife, that there were four of us after her and that we killed her, that was only nonsense.'

'Ay, that and nothing else.'

'Ay, can you imagine such a thing? Four men—I never heard anything so ridiculous! We were human beings after all, weren't we? And you're not to tell a soul!'

'I won't mention a word about it.'

'And you have my thanks for not running after the parson that night, too; but you mustn't carry that any further, either!'

'No.'

'For it's just as I told you once before, you're sure to be hoodoo'ed; I know of some one it happened to and he was jinxed on every ship and on every sea and nobody would ever sail with him.'

'You don't have to tell me,' said Edevart.

'Get into the boat!' cried the steamer-agent.

The brothers rowed home. They spoke of him they had just seen off and Joakim said: 'There is something so strange—wasn't he something like a missionary?'

'How do you mean?'

No, Joakim couldn't explain it, but a missionary, some kind of a missionary. The fact of the matter was that the last twelve years of Polden's life and way of living had been impregnated with the spirit of August; good and evil, each happy blossom, each bitter fruit and all the uncertainty—all could be traced back to him. Ever since the day that August, fresh from his world-wide adventures, had emerged from the land of the mists and stood before them there in Polden, he had exerted an influence upon every soul in the village and its vicinity, ay, he had become their well-spring of knowledge. 'He did a deal of

good,' said Edevart, and Joakim, who was a wise young man and subscribed to a newspaper and all that, agreed to this. But hadn't he been somehow or other a tool, like an axe or a spade?

They rowed steadily and lustily, those two; they had with them in the boat a number of boxes of goods for the store and the four-oar was thus well loaded, but the weather was calm. As they sat rowing, Edevart on the after thwart, Joakim saw only his back and thus was able to talk much more freely than had he been obliged to look his brother in the face. Edevart was surprised to find him so voluble; there was also something unusual in Joakim's tone of voice, something more brotherly—perhaps not exactly brotherly, but gentle.

'He certainly did a lot to change us,' said Joakim obscurely. 'Ay, and to raise us up and pull us down as well. I don't know, is that the way you think about it?'

'Ay, perhaps you're right,' answered Edevart.

'Take me now, I could just as well have got along without a horse.'

'No,' answered Edevart. 'That you could not.'

'Ho, that's what you say!'

They rowed and thought, rowed and thought.

'He was kind to help them with that new place of theirs,' said Edevart.

'Ay, wasn't he, though!' exclaimed Joakim. 'But there was something strange about it all—we've had no rest or peace. He was a stranger to us and brought strange things into our lives. Now up at the north settlement they've begun to bother about calves; they keep them for a time and fatten them up and then they take them over to the inner settlement and sell them for slaughter. They actually make money on them that way.'

'Ay, and is there anything wrong about that?'

'Maybe not,' said Joakim.

'And is it that August's doing?'

'All in all, one thing taken with another, it may be very likely so. Everything was peaceful here before; our father was poor, but that was nothing, he bore it silently and didn't complain, and so it was with mother, too. Can you remember how, when we would give her things, she wouldn't know what to do with them? And can you remember how, whenever we carried a pail of water for her, she said that we were making her lazy—and her in poor health, too?'

Edevart remembered it well.

'There is something evil and swinish about selling those calves,' says Joakim. 'You raise them and get to know them and then you sell them to the grand folk of the parish for veal! How did it use to be before? Ay, we bred our own animals and loved them and it never happened that we sold a cow without knowing how she would be treated at her new home—it was more as though we were letting one of our children go. But we aren't that way any more, we have been changed.'

Edevart isn't able to understand what has come over little brother Joakim, but he answers: 'Ay, we have all become changed.'

A long pause, and then Joakim says: 'He was fatherless and motherless and he had no home of his own. When he came back to us, he was a stranger.'

It begins to dawn upon Edevart that little brother is driving at something special with all this talk of his and it becomes clear to him when Joakim suddenly asks: 'What do you think, Edevart, if you and I had had no home and no parents? Then we would have been no better off than August!' More and more pointedly he continues: 'I don't think, now, any one does himself any good by being homeless and wandering around; we ought to stay where we belong.'

Edevart does not laugh, he takes all this seriously, thinks it over and says: 'But the question is, whether we

oughtn't to try every place in order to find out where we really do belong.'

Joakim: 'Don't we really belong where we are put? For otherwise, we would not have been put there. Take August, for example: he was first of all a child in one place, you know, and then they didn't have enough to keep him there any longer, and he moved to another place where he had more food and better clothes. But after three weeks there, he ran away and went back to the first place. You heard him tell it himself. And do you remember how he said that he had never been so sad at any time later in his life as he had been that time when they were taking him away from that first poor place?'

Edevart remembered it.

Joakim: 'Try to find out where we really belong? . . . Ay, he tried it! Do we really belong where we get the most food, the finest clothes, the most money? If so, our own father and mother would not have been satisfied and thankful for the roof over their heads all their born days here in Polden; no, then it would not be true that they have lived far more happily than, let's say, that August and—ay, and others who prowl around and belong no place at all. What do you think about it?'

'I don't think anything,' mumbled Edevart.

'And now there are any number of folk up at the north settlement who don't want to stay home any longer; they have begun to save up for tickets to take them away, and that's why they do as they do with those calves of theirs. Why, they even sell a cow now and then—they have heard August's foolish chatter and they all want to go off to America.'

'Many have thought of going there,' said Edevart.

Joakim: 'Ay, but you've never thought of it, have you?'

'Ay, thought and thought—but that's out of the question for me now.'

'Well, so that's how it is then, eh! Wheat fields and loads

of money, according to August. But this place was never really his home, he simply stayed here along with other places, for the Lord left him free to prowl around. But worldly goods alone don't make folk any happier inside.'

Edevart turned around on the thwart, looked his brother full in the face and said: 'Then I don't understand why you want five head of cattle when father and mother were satisfied with two.'

'What!' answered Joakim. 'Oh, yes, you understand it all right. It's because at first father and mother were alone, there were just two mouths to feed; but now there are four of us and we need more than two. And that's why we must cultivate our own soil, Norway's soil, so that we don't have to buy so much of our food from foreign lands and suffer for it later by burdening ourselves with high taxes. But that isn't all; the most important thing is that we escape from poor August's fate: to be torn up by the roots from our own barren soil and transplanted into richer and in the end to have to return to barren. I have read that it is not always the richness that counts, no, that it's *never* the richness that counts.'

'Ay, you read and read,' said Edevart. 'Is it reading that counts, then?'

'It counts some, and that's sure. I fertilize with seaweed, and I learned about that from reading. Richness? I don't know whether you noticed those five small aspens that are growing down by the beach? No, you don't walk around any more. But there by the beach stand five small aspens. Four of them were healthy and rich in foliage, but the fifth was scrawny with hardly any leaves. I felt sorry for it and wanted to help it to grow; I carried a tub of cow manure down there with me one Sunday and carefully took up the turf all around the tree and spread manure around the roots and then I watered it and laid the turf back in its place. That was a year ago last autumn. And now this summer—if you please, that little aspen has

scabs, little snow-white sugary pimples all over its trunk and has even sicklier foliage than before. See now, it had come up against conditions it wasn't used to and it didn't thrive.'

'Yes, but it wasn't thriving before either, was it?'

'No. No, it throve according to its circumstance, it was simply the smallest growth. All things cannot be equally big.'

As the summer waned and the mowing season came, Edevart began to work with Joakim and Ezra in turn, since both of them needed help. He did not spare himself effort and was an efficient worker; it began to look as though he would strike root permanently here in Polden. There was no longer anything grand or elegant about him, for now he was neither a skipper nor a store-keeper—he was on a level with the others and seemed to be perfectly content to be almost nothing at all. He did not set foot in the store, but often took walks in the country round about; he must have taken his little brother's words to heart—he even went down to the beach to look at the five little aspens.

And so life passed there in Polden, a monotonous, every-day life in every way—and so life passed everywhere throughout the parish. No imposing leader had raised himself above the rest; the grandest of them all was still perhaps Karolus who lived quite alone and had developed a round fat belly, and besides, owned his farm outright and owed no man. If there had been a doctor here, then he would have been the greatest man, for a doctor has to study seven years before he has learned his magic—and that can't be said about the postmaster or the organist. No, they did not have their own doctor here, they shared the doctor with the neighbouring parish and he had his permanent residence there, not here. But even so, things went along all right in this fashion; ay, everything goes.

In the inner settlement, they bought calves from the northern settlement—Sexton Johnsen smoked his pipe every Sunday on his way to church, and even the pastor was trying to get a post down south. Down south! Why shouldn't everything move along?

In the month of August the fish were dry on the ledges in Polden and the Skipper from Ofoten settled with his workers and again there were pennies in circulation. Poor old Skipper from Ofoten, this year he had not been able to buy more than two-thirds the capacity of his hold, simply because he would not have enough money to pay his ledge folk for a full hold. And that was sad indeed.

But Teodor and Ragna showed only light-hearted indifference. Teodor hired out to Head-man Karolus as mower and did what work he could. He was by no means the worst worker to be had, and if Karolus hadn't taken him, there were others who would; Teodor wasn't bemoaning his fate. Besides, he was clever at cutting hair and his services were sought by the entire village every Sunday after church; thanks to that, he received more than one cup of coffee and one plate of good food. When that pale-grey, undernourished figure of a man paraded about in his handsome high boots, and with a watch that never ran, he was the very personification of combined care-free poverty and elegance.

Ragna, little Ragna, his wife, perhaps saw in him certain imperfections; she might have well enough, but she didn't go into spasms of rage on that account—Ragna was content, after a fashion. And now, having received new goods from Edevart, she made herself a dress, so that she could go to church again, and that was something. She had a child every other year, after which she got up immediately, the same old Ragna. When she heard her husband's tale of his escapade at the fair, no doubt she spat and said thus: 'Pshaw for you! There you had a full wallet almost in your hand and you came home with as

good as nothing at all!' And Teodor doubtless answered: 'Oh, well, we can always do better than we are doing!'

Now a few unexpected things happened.

One Sunday afternoon, Joakim is sitting reading his paper. 'Papst is dead,' he says.

'Papst is dead?' cries Edevart. 'Read it aloud!'

It was a long article, an obituary laden with sadness. The old watch pedlar had been a well-known character all up and down the coast and surely hadn't a single real enemy left in the world. Of course he cheated wherever he could—there were many amusing stories of how old Papst had defrauded the pompous little whippersnappers who slapped him on the back and called him Moses and argued that they knew all about watches. He sneaked in many a bad watch which would run a day or two at most and then stop. But Papst wasn't quite the person one would take him for, judging by his actions; he could be something more than a swindler. In Karmsund, for example, he gave a totally strange young lad a valuable silver watch without charging him a penny. And when folk expressed their astonishment, Papst merely said that the lad had come of an honest family and had a good heart. Even way up north folk could tell similar yarns about Papst. How could it be explained? Innumerable and often shameless swindles, and then suddenly, quite unexpectedly, something wholly different. Sometimes it was merely some honest face that touched him and then he would ignore all possible profit to himself. Youngsters in particular appealed to him. He knew the fascination a watch-chain across the vest had for a lad—there were frequent instances when Papst would give credit to a lad who betrayed a strong wish for a watch. And now, the venerable patriarch would never again be seen at the coast-town fairs; he had died in Trondhjem, in the middle of the month. The consensus of opinion was that he had left a large estate; it was a well-known fact, too, that a certain

eminent lawyer had been called to the old man's bedside some time before his death.

Next it happened that Paulina, coming in to the house one evening, said: 'There was a letter in the mail box. I happened to look in there and found it. It's for you,' she said and handed the letter to Joakim.

Good Lord! a small wrinkled letter from a girl; no doubt it had been dropped into the mail box during the night. Joakim took the letter, blushed furiously and went out immediately. In the morning he had disappeared.

'Maybe he went up to the north settlement,' said Paulina. 'There's a person who has been thinking of going to America, but now, perhaps, she has changed her mind. There are so many there who are counting on America and are saving up for a ticket to take them there. Now it all depends upon whether Joakim will be able to get that idea out of her head!'

And yes, of course; the danger passed—Joakim was singing as he returned home and had apparently gained everything that he had wanted.

But the most astonishing event was still in the future. One day Edevart received through the mail a letter heavily laden with money. It was from a lawyer in Trondhjem; four hundred *kroner*, the letter read, for the money was counted in *kroner* and *øre* now, a hundred dollars in the old coinage, and it had come from Papst. From Papst!

Well, well; some time ago Edevart would have thanked God for this money and used it to take himself over to America, ay, for then he had a good reason for going. But as it was, he took the matter calmly and, for the time being, had no particular use for the money. No, he seemed to have come to rest in Polden; what else was there for him to do but to live and die in Polden?

'What good deed did you do for Papst?' asked Joakim.

Edevart shook his head and answered: 'You ask me, and I'll ask you!'

They read over the letter from the lawyer; it was short and to the point—three lines:

'In accordance with the will of watch-pedlar Papst dictated on his death bed, we are sending you herewith his bequest to you in the amount of four hundred *kroner*. Receipt requested.'

Joakim acknowledged the letter.

Ezra came one Sunday and asked for Edevart. He was not at home, no doubt he had gone off for a walk as he always did when he had his own affairs to think over. Ezra had been to church and had brought Joakim's newspaper back with him; he had also brought a letter for Edevart, a letter from America. They examined it—a yellow, leathery envelope, thin hasty handwriting, many stamps.

Paulina was summoned, and she looked at the letter.

'Shall we burn it up?' asked Joakim.

The other two looked at him and Paulina became alarmed; she whispered: 'No—that's not the thing to do!'

'What do you think, Ezra?' asked Joakim.

'I don't know,' answered Ezra.

'Then we'll burn it up!'

Paulina repeated: 'No, we simply can't do such a thing!'

Joakim said: 'I'll do it.'

He took the letter and was walking away, but Paulina ran after him and stopped him. 'What would you have said if I had burned up your letter that lay in the mail box?'

Joakim thought a moment, handed the letter quickly back to her and said: 'All right, do as you like!'

Paulina would have given anything to see Edevart's

face when he was reading the letter, but he performed this rite in the seclusion of his own room where he remained for some time. When at the noon hour, he came out for his coffee, he wore his usual expression, but he was taciturn and absent-minded. After he had eaten, he went off by himself again.

No one paid any further attention to Edevart and the letter just then, for Karolus came and was more upset than usual—he, too, had been to church and had at last received definite news about Ane Maria; she was now on her way home and would arrive on the next steamer. Karolus was brooding deeply, for here was a serious matter as far as he was concerned; he wanted to get Joakim, his right-hand man, to accompany him when he went to meet his wife at the steamer landing.

Ay, Joakim agreed to do as he wished. 'That will be day after to-morrow,' he said. 'We'll take Edevart's four-oar.'

'But it happens that I've a boat of my own,' said Karolus. 'Wouldn't it be better if we took that eight-oar of mine from the boat-house and went in that?'

'No, why should we do that?'

'I don't know. She may be loaded down with travelling things.'

Joakim didn't see that, so he said nothing.

'She could sit more comfortably in an eight-oar,' said her husband. Oh, he was out of his head again, he had worried so long over this home-coming that he had lost his head completely and didn't know what to do.

'We'll take the four-oar,' said Joakim.

They rowed out Tuesday morning and Karolus continued uneasy in his mind; the four-oar, however, turned out to be plenty large enough. It was a housewife from Polden that stepped into it—Ane Maria, calm and matter-of-fact, with a bundle of clothes under her arm. She gave her hand to each of the men and greeted them, and

Karolus, blushing and smiling oafishly, invited her to sit on the stern sheet. Then they rowed home.

That devil of an Ane Maria, but slightly changed during all these years, perhaps even wearing the same dress she had worn on the day she went away, a pretty woman with a serious face. Since Karolus could find nothing to say, Joakim asked: 'What kind of weather did you have coming north?'

'Fine weather,' said she. 'Oh, is that you Edevart?'

'No,' answered Karolus, 'It's that brother of his, Joakim.'

'Joakim?' she asked. 'Have you become a grown-up man? Ay, time flies.'

That devil of a woman, she neither laughed nor cried; she was just as she had been before she went away; she must have got along very well. 'You're fatter now,' said she to her husband.

'Oh, I'll soon look just like a pig!' he exaggerated and pretended to be downcast, although he had nothing at all against going about with a paunch just as though he were some one of importance.

She asked the news from Polden. It was a bit difficult for the men to tell her anything, for each event would call attention to the length of time she had been away. 'Ay, we dry fish here every year now,' they said.

'I know all that,' she interrupted.

And then there were the several marriages and deaths in the village—even some of these had happened before she had left. Seaman Martinus had died since, Teodor and Ragna had got married since. And then there was that Gabrielsen who had gone bankrupt. 'But now we have a store in Polden,' they said.

Ane Maria, interested: 'It isn't you, is it Karolus, who has a store now?'

No, no, it wasn't he, but Edevart—that is, Paulina. Think of it, that tiny little Paulina; ay, time had flown.

'Ay,' said Karolus who had gained control over himself. 'And now we're to have a post office right here in Polden—I'm the man who will see to that in the county government. Why shouldn't we have a post office as well as the inner settlement?'

Ane Maria treated the matter with indifference.

Joakim said: 'And now as to that August——'

'What August? Oh, he——'

She was told about many people and things and acquainted with Polden's affairs. That devil of a woman, how matter-of-fact she was! How little concerned she seemed over the fact she was returning from prison! There had always been something independent and masterful about Ane Maria; she would soon enough find a place for herself again. But in any event, Karolus was pleased that she had not returned home with tears in her eyes and tender embraces and much excitement. The one trouble was, if only for the sake of the village gossips, that she hadn't brought more luggage with her, seeing that she had been away for such a long time.

Edevart became more and more secretive and it was feared that any day now he would be setting out again. He had been up at the new place to see Hosea and had held her little girl in his arms and given her a ten-crown note with which her mother was to buy something for her. Hosea clapped her hands, but Edevart said deprecatingly that ten *kroner* in the new coinage was worth only two and a half dollars in the old *daler* coinage. 'Ay, ay, you have always been so kind-hearted to us all!' said Hosea. And these words must have gone straight to Edevart's heart and made him feel foolish, for he turned on his heel at once and left without even saying *Farvel.*

Joakim and Paulina are in consultation. They speak in whispers and even so, are afraid of being overheard.

'No, we ought to have burned the letter,' says Joakim.

'Ay,' agrees Paulina.

'For it didn't do him any good.'

'No.'

'If only we could keep him here until he has time to get over it!'

'I was wondering,' says Paulina, that wise and crafty Paulina, 'if I couldn't manage to borrow that money of his for a while.'

'H'm. Ay, if you only could!'

'I could say I need it to buy goods with to last from now till Christmas.'

'Ay. That's it exactly! That's the remedy, for Edevart would not say no to you, he never used to say no. . . .' And Joakim was so relieved that he laughed aloud; that was the best thing they could think of, a bit of stratagem. And then he immediately announced that he would have to be making a hasty run up to the northern settlement this evening; an important mission it was and he would have to act quickly—it had to do with a seine crew or some such thing as that. But he would be back again early the following morning.

But in the morning Edevart was gone. He must have heard that Paulina was wanting to borrow his travel money, or else he had guessed it. When Joakim returned and found his brother nowhere about, he ran down at once to the boat-house—he stared—the four-oar was gone.

Well, well, that was his usual manner of departure—no farewells.

A tragic day. They called in Ezra, and told their aged father about it; they were as grief-stricken as though death had visited the house. Hosea sobbed aloud. But might it not be that he had merely rowed off on some business errand or other and would come back soon?

He did not come back—for a long time.

THE END